



From Darkness To Light

Acts 26:18 and Ephesians 1:18

To Light Part 2



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Acts 26:18 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.

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Light Lesson 1

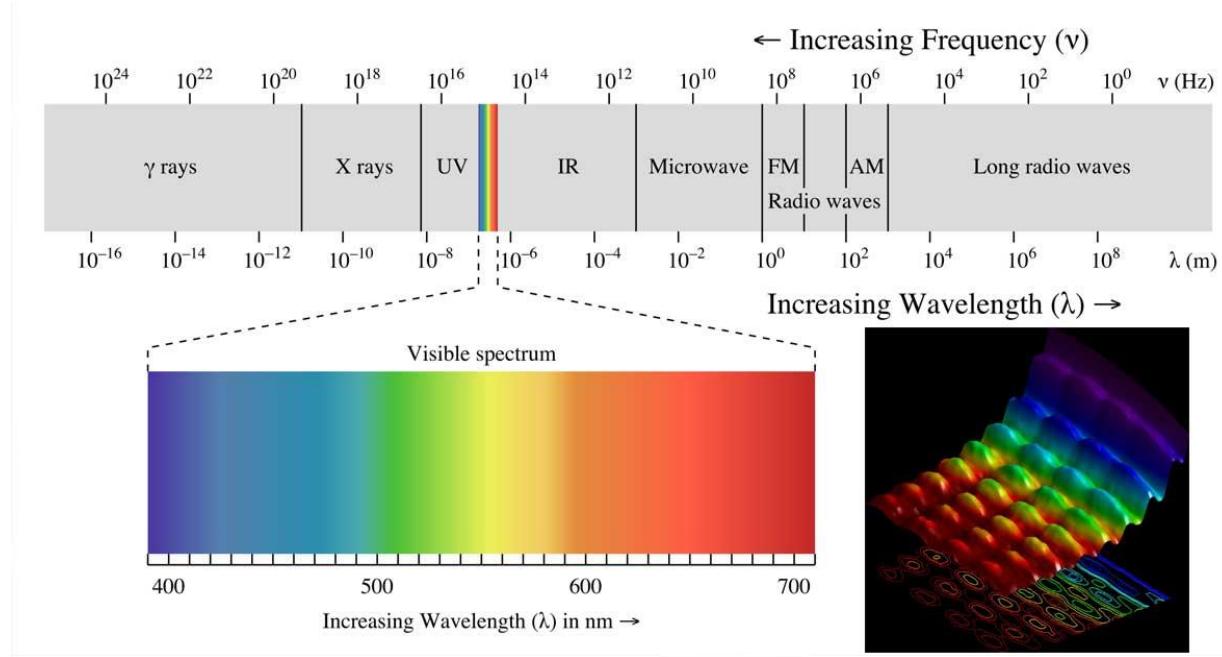
God is Light: A Story of Light (Part 1)

by T.S. Stephens

In the Beginning, God Created Light

In the beginning at creation, God made light. Genesis 1:3-4 reads, “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.” (The stars, sun, and moon are later in day four of creation.) Life on Earth gets energy from the sun, mostly via photosynthesis. The light is all around humanity in God’s creation. The next section discusses light from an academic and scientific perspective relating to God as Creator and Light. If you are not interested, skip to the last paragraph of this section.

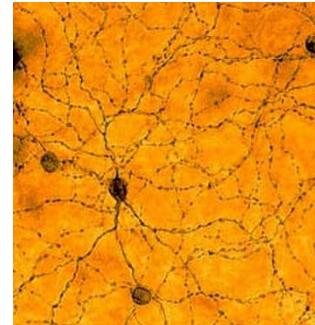
Today, scientists define light as the visible spectrum of electromagnetic radiation that humans register with eyes, about 390 to 700 nm. It gives humans the beautiful colors seen. Light travels at 2997922488 meters per second² or 3.0×10^8 m/s². **Light is fast but never hurried.** It is understood by science as a constant. It is steady, never resting or turning off. It can travel vast distances as the stars demonstrate. It silently brings energy to our noisy world. It is always **quiet**. When one watches a sunset, God’s palette of light dazzles the eyes and quietly mesmerizes the mind. Joy often overwhelms the observer when beholding the



rainbow of colors. Most have caught themselves staring at their spouse or child and soaking the person into their heart. Many can recall specific occurrences when they felt a connection to their wife, husband, or their newborn as they soaked them in visually. Christians need to spiritually see God and seek Him, becoming a partaker of the Divine Nature by God's promises (2 Pet 1:3-4).

God has given humanity two lights in creation called the greater and lesser, or sun and moon, one reflecting the other. In a hurry-up world, full of electric lights, many fail to observe the light of "Luna" during the night time. Light pollution often prevents one from appreciating the stars. Most humans, like most of creation, seek the light. Sunflowers even turn toward the sun as it moves through the sky. Many flowers and other plant life grow and change to the sun. Humans love to soak up the sun as well. The sunlight impacts humans. Even a few low sunlight days in Winter will cause many to have "seasonal affective disorder." Humans make vitamin D when the sunlight hits their skin and receive a boost of energy from the sun. Even in most of the blind, the sun impacts a person's circadian rhythm's sleep and wake cycle.

Within the last two decades, a new class of retinal cells has been identified. These cells are non-image forming vision cells that impact the circadian system in the hypothalamus as well as other brain areas for regulation. These cells are different from other photoreceptors because they communicate directly to the brain. The intrinsically photosensitive retinal ganglion cells (*ipRGC*) carries a signal to the brain of light. Neurotransmitters are also proposed to change with sunlight exposure. Even newer studies indicate that children who spend more time in the sunlight lessen their development of myopia or nearsightedness. (Photo of ipRGC by David Berson of Brown University)



Humans need and seek the light. In the same way, the human soul yearning for the light of God as eternity is part of the human makeup (Eccl 3:11). People who spend all their time indoors or in the dark suffer and tend to be less energetic and more depressed. Many similarly are not getting enough of the daily recommended dose of spiritual light from God's word. **God's light calls His saints to be holy as He is, beholding the splendor of His light in the darkness of the world. Christians are to be "children of the light," seeking to walk in the light** (John 12:36; Eph 5:8; 1 Thes 5:5). **As His child, Christians want to carry and reflect His light and love.**

In the Garden Satan Deceives, Eve Disbelieves, and Adam Disobeys: Eyes Opened

Adam and Eve's eyes were opened after they ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Not believing God, Eve was deceived by the serpent; and Adam chose to disobey God (1 Tim 2:14). Genesis 3:4-7 records, "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."



Some have speculated that Adam and Eve's eyes were physically changed. However, most understand this to mean their understanding was opened. **Their fall opened their eyes of understanding.** They saw themselves as naked. **Sin separated them from the relationship they had with God.**

Eyes Darkened

From a relationship with God in the garden to being cast out, humanity's eyes were darkened. Satan had used the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life on Eve. He is still using this to blind the minds of people today. 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 instructs, "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. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 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."

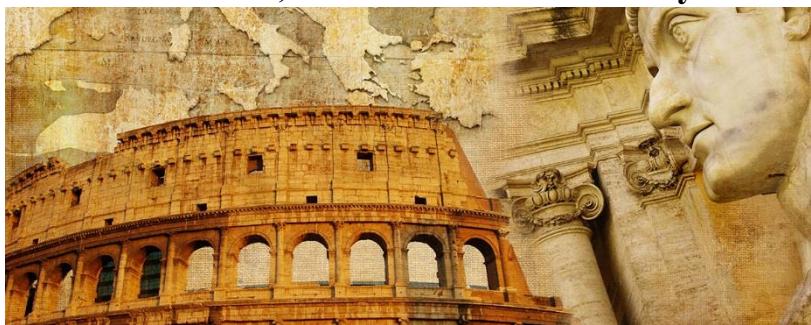


Similarly, Israel's eyes were blinded and darkened as Romans 11: 7-11 explains: "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God

hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.”

The Gentiles were also blinded and darkened by Satan as Ephesians 4:17-19 explains: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

From the Garden of Eden to now, both Jews and Gentiles have had their eyes darkened because of Satan’s lies. **Today, American society is very much a Romans 1 culture, such that the culture’s eyes are darkened.** Romans 1:20-22



explains, “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: 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. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools....” From Adam and Eve to Israel to the Gentiles to today, Satan has darkened the eyes of humanity with versions of the lies from the Garden of Eden.

Coming into Focus

Humans are designed to see. The brain and eyes are incredibly designed.



When the eye cannot move properly, optometrists use prisms to move an image or the light to an eye. From a spiritual standpoint, one might call the capacity to turn from the carnal to the spiritual an “eternal prism” or “lens of faith” that is focused on Christ and the eternal, seeing the unseen. Satan often blinds with the lenses of sin. These are distractions, distortions, and lies that he

uses to draw souls away from Yahweh. **Humanity’s spiritual eyes or understanding is blinded by Satan’s lies. Christians must learn to see through the eternal prism or lens of faith, looking to the spiritual rather than the flesh to focus on Christ.**

When a child is born, it still must learn to see. Newborns with perfectly normal eyes learn to focus and attend to things. The mind and eyes continue to learn and to become part of human function. In folks who have gained sight after having lost it as a child, they often are still very lost visually when they receive their sight. They do not know what to do with the information they “see.”

One interviewer asked such a person what an object in his hand was. The newly sighted person knew it was red. He had seen and had identified a red coke can earlier in the interview. He guessed, “Coke can.” He could not tell the interviewer that the object was a rose. **People learn to see.** The newly re-sighted often struggles with this phenomenon. They can see the dog but cannot identify it until they pet it. People who never could see since birth, even if their eyes are repaired, cannot see as one generally thinks of seeing because they never learned to see in terms of their brain.



Like physical sight, Christians must learn to see spiritually. It takes time to change our thinking. **“Children of light” are transformed into the image of Christ (Rom 12:1-2) by the renewing of their minds.** When sin is part of one’s lives, it obfuscates their vision.

1 John 1:7-8 instructs, “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.” Satan often dazzles humans with the sin of a temporary trinket or flashing toy. Christians must return to the true Light found through God’s word to grow and focus on Christ.

God seeks to set a light ablaze in the human heart so we might carry His light to others. The Psalmist expresses it this way: “For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.”

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:12 writes, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Paul taught that eventually, “children of light” will see clearly as though face to face. He explains in 2 Corinthians 3:13-18, “And not as Moses, *which* put a vail over his face [after coming down from the mountain where God was], that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.”



Moses’ face glowed after the Lord hid him in the cleft of the rock and covered Moses with His hand, but saw God’s back parts, not His face (Exod 33:21-33). When Moses spoke to the Israelites, his face glowed, and he wore a vail (Exod 34:33-35). Now, God’s children see in reflection the glory of God and are changed into the same image to glory.

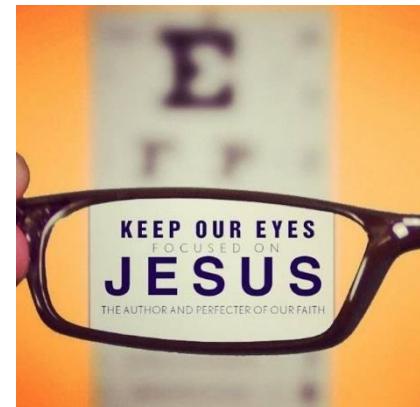
Keeping Focus on Christ and God

As Christians learn to see spiritually, they become focused on seeking God and His righteousness. In Matthew 6:22-23, Jesus teaches, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of

light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness!” The idea of “single” is sometimes translated as “clear” or “healthy,” but this author might suggest it is better communicated as “focused.”

When our focus is locked on the light of Christ, then the whole body is full of light. In John 8:12 Jesus taught, “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.” Jesus is the light of life. In Matthew 6:33, He teaches His followers to focus on the kingdom of God and His righteousness first. All these other worries of life fade as one’s focus is on God.

Hebrews 12:1 encourages, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us 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, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” **Christians must learn to see spiritually or transform to be image bearers of God’s light by being renewed through His word, keeping their eye on Christ.**



Christians must take care to set aside the many encumbering sins of this life as Hebrew 12 encourages. Too often, one is unstable because he or she is not focused on God but is double minded. James warns Christians to be clear. “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8). It is easy to be distracted by things in this life and take one’s eye off the goal of seeking God and following Jesus.

In Matthew 14, Jesus bids Peter to walk to Him on the water, but Peter took his eyes off Jesus. He focused fearfully and doubtfully on the storm and began to sink. Matthew 14:30-31 records, “And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Jesus warned all not

to look back. Luke 9:62 explains,” And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Christians must focus on God and His righteousness.

Men as Trees

Jesus healed the blind man on the way to Bethsaida. Mark uniquely records this in Mark 8:22-25, “And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that He put *his* hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.” Jesus healed this way intentionally as Mark recorded it. Although the reason is not explicitly stated, it was not some failure of Jesus’ ability to heal. The text is making a point.



Earlier in 8:17-18, Jesus asks the disciples, “And when Jesus knew *it*, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?” So why did Jesus heal the man in Mark 8 in two parts?

Jesus gave the blind man eyes, but he still could not see. This is common in today’s world as well, which is fortunate for me as an optometrist. However, as a parent, I have lost my calm collective with my sons when asking them how they do not get an idea that I have pounded into their thinking. “Why do you not understand?”

Jesus was clearly making a subtle point with the previous discussion in the healing. Even now, many have great eyes and bad vision, while others have bad eyes and great vision. **Many see but do not see or understand clearly.** Jesus gives everyone what he or she needs as an individual, either great events or hard events to help one mature spiritually. **God is just but treats each person individually.** This is hard at times for humans to grasp. God does not treat everyone the same way, but rather as individuals. Many have seen it with their

own kids as one child has reached a point where a reward or recognition was ready for one but not the other. At this point, sibling rivalry sometimes surfaces. Humans, as clay, do not get to grumble to the Potter about how He chooses to use the lives He has given. He has promised Christians the important part in eternity as His children. Often, as folks are older, they realize what they thought was horrible in their lives was actually a blessing in disguise. God deals with all according to individual needs.

Christians all grow and spiritually mature differently. Some struggle to make their vision clear or get distortion from other things in life. Most people have areas of blurry vision spiritually – even blind spots. Often Christians are impatient children of God. Some Christians pray for God to give them patience right now! Unfortunately, it usually does not work out that way. Children of light obey starting as babes in Christ, as little children, they mature through stages as they learn and grow. Children of God learn to walk in the faith often by trying, falling, and retrying.

Often, we see more mature individuals rush new converts with an expectation that they should move along and catch up. More mature Christians need to be careful of too great of expectations. At the same time, **Christians cannot stay as babes, but must grow and seek God, even when their transformation is not as fast as more mature children of God might like.** If we are a Christian and recognize spiritual blindness in others, then we must seek God to help them see. 2 Peter 1 instructs us to be diligent to add virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to their faith. 2 Peter 1:8-9 explains the result, “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.”



Nearsightedness or myopia means one cannot see off in the distance. These characteristics or graces in 2 Peter 1 are part of the Christian's armor of light and are what one might call “spiritual myopia and blindness control.” If Christians exercise these, then they will not be myopic or blind. **God will make use of those who submit to His righteousness, bringing fruit and goodness from them in His kingdom.**

The man at Bethsaida in Mark 8 was joyful at what he could see. “I see men as trees.” Seeing the 20/400 big “E” on the chart is not 20/20, but it is exciting when before all one could see was blackness. He was also open with his lack. Children of God must be open with their faults and weakness -- blind, blurry, or whatever, in such cases, we must take ourselves to the great Healer.

Christians must confess their sin to God as well as each other (1 John 1:9, James 5:16).

Confession seems to be very neglected in this time. Sometimes, it is difficult for a person to admit his or her inability to see spiritually and to express weakness or vulnerability. God can help His children, but they need to be open and direct about where they are struggling.

Too often folks lament struggling with sin when they are really snuggling sin. These two words are but two letters different.

Struggle tries to express a smidge of guilt. However, many times, even those in the church are far more comfortable snuggling with sin than struggling to escape its corruption. In this healing of the blind man, Jesus was calling His disciples back to Mark 8 where, despite having eyes, they did not see. He used the man at Bethsaida to make a subtle point.

Conclusion

In the beginning, God created light. God is light. Light is multifaceted and many splendored. It is quiet, unhurried, and powerful. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been deceiving humanity’s eyes and ears with his lies, such that human eyes are darkened. Christ came to cure spiritual blindness and open eyes to see the spiritual rather than the temporal. Once one can focus and make their eyes “single” (See Matt 6:22 and Luke 11:39), then these “children of light” must keep their focus on Christ and God. Jesus healed the blind then, and He cures spiritual blindness now. The story of light continues in Lesson 2.



Light Lesson 1 Questions

God is Light: A Story of Light (Part 1)

1. God is light. What do we learn about light from observation?

2. How were humanity's eyes darkened?

3. How do we keep our eye single (See Matt 6:33 and Luke 11:39)? What should one's focus be?

4. Why do you think Jesus healed the blind man in Mark 8 in parts?

5. Why do we often fail to confess sin to each other and God? What are the consequences of those failures?

Light Lesson 2

God is Light:

A Story of Light (Part 2)

by T.S. Stephens

Introduction

In the previous lesson, we learned part of the light story. In the beginning, God created light. God is light. Light is multifaceted and many splendored. It is quiet, unhurried, and powerful. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been deceiving humanity's eyes and ears with his lies, such that human eyes are darkened. Christ came to cure spiritual blindness and open eyes to see the spiritual rather than the temporal. Once one can focus and make their eyes single, then these "children of light" must keep their focus on Christ and God. Jesus healed the blind then, and He cures spiritual blindness now. Let us continue the story of light.

Reflecting God's Light

As a child of the light, we seek to keep our focus on Jesus and to imitate Him. **Our goal is to be His image bearer as we are transformed in obedience through the renewing of our mind to righteousness and holiness** (Rom 12:1-2, Eph 4:23ff). So, in the mind's eye, when one thinks of God and Christ and heaven from many passages, the idea of a strong pure white light often comes to mind. Hebrews 1:3 records, "Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Revelation 1:16 records, "And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength." 2 Corinthians 4:6 reads, "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." Other passages such as Matthew 28:3 and Revelation 4, give a finite mind the idea again of pure white, overpowering light.



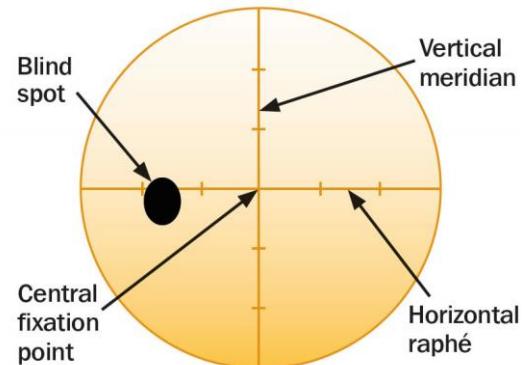
God is light. Christ is the express image and the brightness of His glory. Christians are called to imitate Jesus, to be holy, and share the light of the

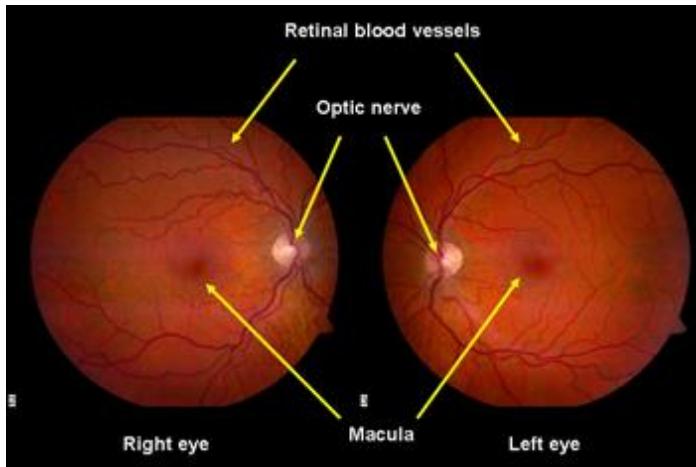
gospel. Christians are God's image bearers to the world. The most powerful light to the human senses is the sun. In the mind's eye of understanding, we can see God as the sun and the rays of the sun as Christ. Christians are the reflecting surface or mirror of that "light." People might not understand or be able to see if their mirror is dull. (If you have never seen an old mirror, please observe the difference in the mirrors more in use now.)

Thinking of God as light, we should see the intrinsic quality of God is holiness. Folks use words like "righteousness" and "holiness" without really contemplating the word's meaning it seems. In God's word, we read God is love. We read God is light. However, God is also called "holy, holy, holy." The scriptures do not use this repetition without purpose. This is the very quality or nature of God. He commanded his children to be holy because He is holy, holy, holy. **He calls Christians to partake of his divine nature and holiness.** He instructs His followers to perfect holiness. (See 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 3:18; Heb 1:3; 1 Cor 15:49; Col 1:15; Col 3:10; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 4:4; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 4:24; 1 Thes 4:9; Heb 12:10; 1 Pet 1:15-16; Isa 6:3; and Rev 4:8.)

Blind spots

Human eyes have blind spots. The key part of the human eye is the macula (or fovea centralis). It is where the best reading and driving vision are located. This is where humans get their 20/20 vision. Diseases in the macula like macular degeneration cause damage that yields vision loss. However, just across the back of the eye from the macula is the optic nerve head. From the optic nerve head, all the nerves spread throughout the back of the eye. The optic nerve carries information from the eye to the brain and from the brain to the eyes. Humans could not see without the optic nerve. Diseases such as glaucoma cause damage to the optic nerve. Thus, we cannot see without an optic nerve to carry the image to the brain, but we cannot see with the optic nerve as it does not gather image information as the photoreceptor cells. The optic nerve is a place in the back of the eye where there are no photoreceptors. Thus, it is a blind spot, even though it is busy carrying information to and from the brain. Eye care doctors use this as reference for tests frequently.





It is easy for Christians to have blind spots to sin.

Sometimes, we are self-righteous or justify ourselves. Sometimes, we exist in hypocrisy. It is often the lie of Satan or one that we have told ourselves. Christians often wrongfully try to compare themselves with others as a false standard.

Paul spoke of Jewish teachers in Romans 2:19 as "...confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness." Similarly, Jesus challenged the scribes and Pharisees to see their blindness, "Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether *is* greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?" (Matt 23:16-19). He continued in verses 23-28 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

The scribes and Pharisees were the blind leading the blind. They taught the commandments of men. Matthew 15:14 describes the scribes and Pharisees, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." These leaders did not care for the lost. They cared about their place, power, and position. It was not selfless but selfishness that motivated them. Their worship of God was vain as they honored God with their lips, but their heart was far removed.

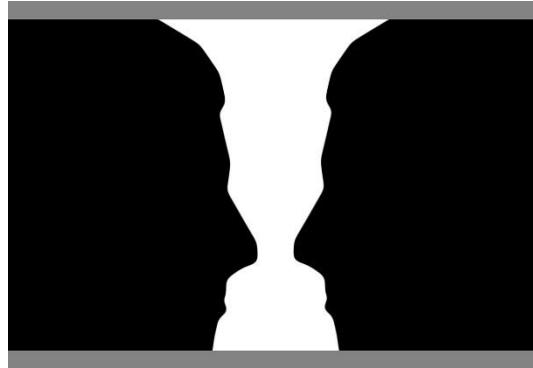
Can this be Christians today? Absolutely! This author calls it the “**Baptized Believer Syndrome.**” Members of the church act as though they think they cannot fall, even though Israel did (Heb 3:12-4:2). The church often seems to un-vocally say that baptism alone is going to save you, even though it alone will not (1 Cor 10:1-12). Like Israel, children of God can fall because of idolatry (covetousness), sexual immorality, testing Christ, and grumbling. We can be guilty of whitewashing or mask of Christianity today.

Sometimes our blind spots are specific to our individual weaknesses. Christians need to be vulnerable enough to confess these things so that others can help them. Christians need help from one another. It is shameful to allow past sin to keep us from confession and seeking heaven. Is it the pride of life that keeps us from confessing sin and seeking help from escaping it? Everyone needs help. Real strength and real struggle call on others to aid in the battle of obedience. If our house was on fire, would we be resistant to asking the neighbor for help to call the fire department?

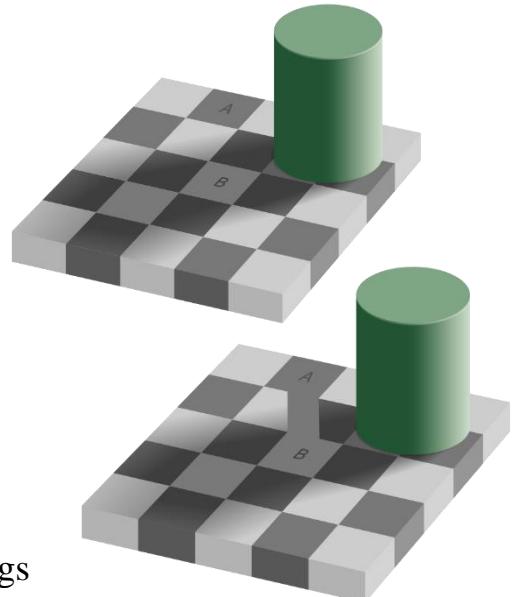


Walk by Faith Not by Sight

2 Corinthians 5:7 reads, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Human sight and eyes can be fooled by quick hands and optical illusions. In fact, the brain often completes gaps in human vision. Consider a few optical illusions of how the eye and brain can be fooled. (These were chosen because they are acceptable in printed grayscale). The silhouette illusion can be two faces or a vase.



The simultaneous contrast illusion has a gradient background that progresses from dark grey to light grey. The horizontal bar appears to progress from light gray to dark gray, but it is just one color. The checker shadow illusion also fools the eyes. Although square A appears a darker shade of grey than square B, in the image, the two have exactly the same luminance. Drawing a connecting bar between the two squares breaks the illusion and shows that they are the same shade.



Christians must be careful of trusting their sight more than faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1). Physical sight often acts in opposition to faith because of the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Christians see how the ungodly enjoy their sin. Physical vision might be manipulated to say faith is a lie. Sight is typically focused on Satan’s worldly trinkets. Faith sees through the eternal prism – seeing life in the goal of seeking God. **When focused on this world, Christians are being guided by the values of their former, carnal person. Christians need to walk in faith instead, focused on Christ.** Those trinkets are the desires of the flesh and eyes and the ego. When we set those aside and refocus our eyes on the eternal, the unseen realm of heaven, then we can walk towards the goal in the light of Christ. The Christian’s goal is not on the fleshly things but on the eternal.

The Christian soldier's orders are clear in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5: "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...." The mind is the battleground of this war. Satan seeks to destroy while God seeks to transform His children into the "light," the image of His Son. This spiritual warfare requires Christians to bring their thinking to the obedience of Christ. The Christian's work is to share God's light and love. To see the battleground, Christians must focus their view and thinking with the eternal prism – using the spiritual value system as opposed to a carnal value system.



Temporal Versus Eternal or Seen Versus Unseen

Faith is the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1). **The "children of light" have a different perspective than the natural human.** They seek to build a life on the eternally significant, pleasing God, living with a perception of the eternal which the natural person cannot see as anything but foolish. Hebrews 12:1 challenges the child of God to fix his or her eyes on Jesus. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 instructs: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal." The "children of light" seek to lead a life perfecting holiness focused on the eternal rather than the temporal trinkets that Satan uses to dazzle the eyes.

Christian Warfare and Armor of Light

The Christian's warfare is in the mind and heart where he or she seeks to bring every thought to the obedience of Christ. These weapons are not fleshly but are powerful through God. Christians walk in the world like all other humans, but they do not seek or war after the carnal. Instead, they seek the eternal (2 Cor 10:3-5). God has provided truth and instruction in righteousness. He has provided the gospel, what one needs to grow their faith, salvation, and His word. Christians must exercise putting on the whole armor of "light" with prayer and perseverance as they wrestle against Satan (Eph 6:11-18).

Lift Up Your Eyes

There is a zombie show that is popular on television at this writing called “The Walking Dead.” The characters on the show are constantly meeting the walking dead zombies. **Christians who work and meet others every day are encountering those who are spiritually dead. Their eyes are blinded by Satan, and they cannot see the eternal.** They typically become ensnared and then enslaved to the sin that Satan has used to lie to them. As a Christian, does one see these folks walking around like the walking dead spiritually? Children of God can bring them to Christ, who can save them. If someone was facing a disease and a person could heal them, most would try to save that person.

Jesus expressed it this way in John 4:35-36: “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.” I grew up working in agriculture. When the crop is ready to be harvested, then it is all hands available. When the harvest is particularly plentiful, there are always too few laborers. This is also true in God’s vineyard (Matt 9:37-38 and Luke 10:2). Christians must be about the work God has set before them – spreading the gospel. But they will only do so if they see the importance of the eternal and value the lost souls around them who are condemned to hell without the gospel. **The Christian can help God raise those who are spiritually dead to walk in newness of life with God by sharing the gospel.**



“...we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...”
1 Corinthians 15:51b-52a

In the Twinkling of An Eye

There are few guarantees in life. And there is only one certainty: Each human will face death or Christ’s return, and thus judgment. It will either be a great day or a day of dread and doom. Peter challenges Christians who understand Jesus is returning to lead lives of holiness and godliness (2 Pet 3:11-13). When Christ returns, those who belong to Him will be changed. Then, He will deliver the kingdom to God the Father. From the perishable, dishonored, natural, and mortal, Christians will be changed into the imperishable, glorified, immortal, and spiritual. The “children of light” will continue to bear the image of Christ in His victory over sin and death. This all will happen when Christ returns in the twinkling of an eye.

1 Corinthians 15:52 celebrates, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” With this promise of victory, Paul encourages Christians to be “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

Conclusion

In the beginning, God created light. God is light. Light is multifaceted and many splendored. It is quiet, unhurried, and powerful. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been deceiving humanity’s eyes and ears with his lies, such that human eyes are darkened. Christ came to cure spiritual blindness and open eyes to see the spiritual rather than the temporal. Once we can focus and make our eyes single (See Matt 6:22 and Luke 11:39), then these “children of light” must keep their focus on Christ and God. Jesus healed the blind, and He cures spiritual blindness now.

Christians must carry and reflect God’s light while perfecting holiness in their lives. This requires bringing all in obedience to Christ while battling the blind spots of sin. Christians must be careful not to trust the carnal eye, but to walk by faith instead of sight. This requires looking to the eternal and not the temporal. The Christian wants to share the gospel, trying to save all in the harvest that is for eternity. Jesus will come again in the twinkling of an eye.



Light Lesson 2 Questions

God is Light: A Story of Light (Part 2)

1. How do we perfect holiness in our lives?
 2. How do we overcome blind spots to sin?
 3. Why do we walk by faith?
 4. Why is it important for Christians to walk by faith and not by sight? What are the dangers of trusting our sight?
 5. What is meant by Christ will return in the twinkling of an eye?

Light Lesson 3

God is Light:

From Darkness to Light

by Shawn Bain

In reading **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**, who is responsible for the darkness and the light existing in the world?

Of the two extremes mentioned above, which dominates most in the world?

On an annual Sunday, the morning known as “sunrise service,” hundreds of people gather in anticipation of someone uttering these words with emphasis – “Christ the Lord is Risen.” The reason is because of the new light of that Sunday which brought the resurrection of Jesus. Although, there is no clarification of this special Sunday having a primary emphasis in scripture, the day of Jesus’ resurrection is symbolic of “the Light” (Jesus) raised back into the world. To the contrary of emphasizing this special “sunrise service,” Christians are to remember each first day of the week the Lord’s resurrection to light from the darkness of the grave.



The few days before Jesus’ resurrection needs our attention at the moment. Three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) present a day of darkness literally so (**Matt 27:45**). What was God saying in this darkness? It is not, “Christ is Risen!!”. “He is dying” on the cross that day, which means it was getting dark. The light is going out, which is how we refer to the death of anyone. It is a darkness, but what is the meaning of the darkness.

The Light of Life was Going Out

Jesus was dying. He was losing life, and the light of the world was going out. His death was terminal and would not be stopped. A light which should have

shined longer but went out sooner. This “light” was outside, hanging on a cross, not in a hospital bed or at home as most people might be. He was in the public’s eye to show how much the darkness of sin and its power reigns. As the SUN went out, the SON was going out as well. Satan’s power had come to a hopeless, helpless world. At that moment he was the winner.

The Purity and Perfection of Life was Dying

Before His death upon the cross, Jesus had spoken of leaving, and it troubled the apostles (**John 14:1-3**).

Why did Jesus leaving bother His apostles?

Jesus leaving was not only darkness. He was made to be sin and its darkness, corruption, and disease with all its impurities and ugliness (**2 Cor 5:21**). All of this was taking over the innocent Christ. Jesus was being paid the wages of sin - death. We may think it is bad in this world with its corruption and say “it is a dark world we live in.” Think about all that sin taking over the Christ in the darkness of His death.



There is one reality in the dark death of Jesus. My sin brought the darkness of death to Jesus that day. The darkness of my sin took away the “light.”

God’s Favor of Jesus is Removed

God’s justice toward His displeasure of sin in the world was manifest the day of Jesus’ death. God’s love for man sought to remove the darkness of sin. God delighted in Jesus being the one upon whom that darkness would rest. Most would believe this is where God would rescue Jesus from suffering a painful death. Those crucifying Him referred to God and said, “*let him deliver him now, if he desireth him...*” (**Matt 27:43**). God took His favor away and allowed Jesus to die (**Matt 27:46**). God “forsakes” the sin which Jesus bore.

All of these points of death which came upon Jesus should call upon us to have an attitude of disgust and anger toward sin. No man should “buddy up” next to the darkness of sin. No man should “lighten up” on the proclamation of sin’s

devices and destructions. Sin has been and always will be a serious, darkening problem.

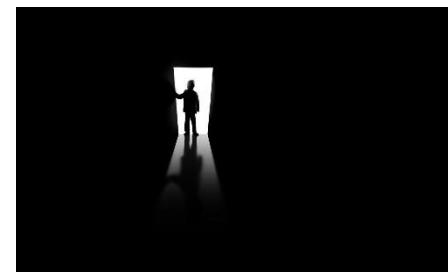
In the midst of the dark moments of Jesus' death, what does **2 Corinthians 4:6** says happened?

To See the Light, You have to Deal with the Darkness

What is the powerful transformation described in **Colossians 1:12-14**?

Who made such a powerful transformation possible?

Before being a Christian, each person must deal with the darkness. A person has to see its disappointment. Notice the darkness of your life, then come to the light of salvation (**John 14:6**). Come to understand those saved by faith in Christ are not merely improved, they are radically transformed from darkness to light. The conditions are opposite from darkness, totally. We are delivered from death, given eternal life, and saved from the grave of sin to a new life (**2 Cor 5:17**) in the light which is characterized by good works (**Eph 2:9,10**) to become sons of the living God children of light (**John 1:12; Eph 5:8**).



This change in our condition should be followed by a corresponding change in our conduct.

How does **Ephesians 4:1** describe the walk of a Christian?

What further indications of a Christian's walk in the light are found in **Ephesians 4:2-16**?

In **Ephesians 4:17-32**, how different is the walk in the light versus the walk in the darkness?

How we deal with darkness is not to adopt the popular perception of Christianity often presented as though faith in Jesus Christ requires no great change. Some present Christianity as just “adding” Christ to your life experience. “Invite Christ into your life” like you would a friend or family member. You know they will not stay long. It will be a pleasant, short time with minimal inconvenience.

Whenever a Christian trusts God in the change from darkness to light, it is not small or a few things which need adjusting. It is radical transformation. The same was true with Jesus coming from the grave. It was death to life, darkness to light. Our life in the light is abandoning darkness to live in the light - Jesus Christ.



When Jesus spoke of being a disciple, He cautioned those who would do so quickly to “*count the cost.*” In reading **Luke 9:23, 24, 57-62**, what cost is there to being a disciple and walk in the light?

Living in the light is not when I feel like it or when I do not, when it inspires me or not, or when I want to or not. To remove such a lazy approach, Jesus calls our attention to the words of **Ephesians 5:14**: “*Wherefore he saith, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee.”*” This statement comes from **Isaiah 60:1-3**, describing light and darkness. The admonition in that passage is to be light among the nations. Isaiah spoke to this theme of light and darkness in one particular case pointing out how some confuse the two in **Isaiah 5:20**, “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness.*” In **Isaiah 42:6, 7, 16**, the prophet exalts God by how He will bring those in darkness to light (**Isa 50:10; 51:4**).

The theme of bringing people from darkness to light continues in the New Testament. In the gospels, at the beginning the “Light” came into the world, Jesus Christ (**Luke 2:25-32, John 1:4-9**). Jesus spoke of himself as the light (**John 8:12; 12:46**) and spoke of those who followed him as light (**Matt 5:14; John 12:35, 36**). Then in the book of **Acts** and the epistles, the theme continues. As the writer of many of those epistles, Paul’s conversion is an example which came from literally being in darkness, not able to see, to seeing when the message of light was taught to him (**Acts 9:8-18**). He spoke or wrote about light and darkness in **Acts 13:47; Rom 13:11-14; 2 Cor 4:3-6; 6:14-18; 11:13-15; Col 1:9-14; 1 Thes 5:1-11**.

A fellow apostle, Peter spoke of all Christians being “*called out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (**1 Pet 2:9,10**). John also says we should walk in the light to have fellowship with God & other brethren (**1 John 1:5-10**). All of these passages indicate how God in His infinite wisdom shows man how to deal with darkness by coming to Him and reflecting in our life His light.

What Does Living as Lights Rather than Darkness Mean?

What does light do for a tree or plant? It brings growth. Light produces fruit. What does **Ephesians 5:9-11** say is produced by the light?

**Note in the passage the contrast of what fruit the light brings versus the “*unfruitful works*” from darkness.

Every Christian is commanded to desire light. We are not to merely avoid the thoughts and deeds of darkness but to do what is right and fruitful to please the One who delivered us from darkness to light. The closer and longer our association with the light motivates us to avoid all forms of darkness. We will say, “I don’t need to do that,” “that’s wrong,” “I can’t look like that, say those words, or believe that any longer.” Yet, we need not place so much emphasis on the negative, avoidance, or what is prohibited (**v.3**, *not even be named among you as becometh saints*). If so, we may fail to see the value of the light, where we should live and the fruit we can bear.



Living in the light is not blending with the darkness. Light always exposes darkness. What being in the light means is living in a society where immoral values, ideas, and patterns are exposed. Light shines upon a world who is rethinking sexuality, church work, means of salvation, items of worship, etc. Those who live in the light are being pressed to put out the light, put it down, and do not shine so bright. We need to examine who we are based upon what Jesus says in **Luke 11:33-36**.

What is the responsibility of a disciple in that passage?

We need to refuse to look into the world of darkness for help, answers, guidance, and hope. Look at the kingdom of light. Draw the line between dark and light. Protect the purity of the church by protecting the purity of your life. Manifest the light. Refuse to turn the light down low. Talk about the light. Talk about what coming from the darkness to the light has brought to your life. Do not be afraid of it. Believe it. Live it. Be blessed by the light...

Light Lesson 4

God is Light:

A Christian Is the Light of the World

by Eric Krieg

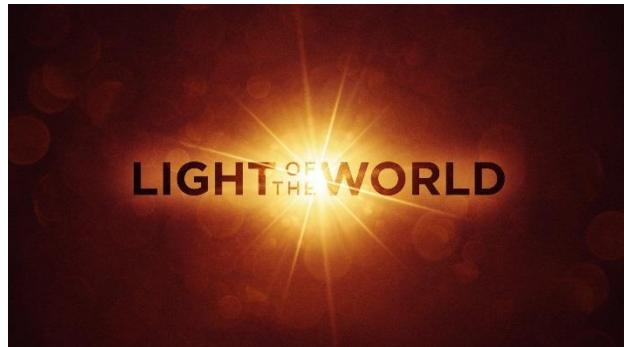
What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is the light of the world.

That is, a Christian is responsible for reflecting Christ's light in this world. As the Christian studies and meditates on God's word, he/she is filled with light. Then, as the Christian lives, this light should shine through everything you do. In fact, rather than shining a light that is of your own making, you simply reflect Christ's light to the world as He fills you through His written word in the Bible.

The purpose of this lesson is to consider why and how Christians are to be lights to the world, reflecting God's light. First, we will consider that Jesus was the light of this world. Second, we will consider what it means for you to be a light of the world. Third, we will consider how you should let your light shine. And, fourth, we will consider some common baskets that some use to cover their lights.

Jesus Is the Light of This World

John opened his gospel record by pointing us to the example of the greatest Light that has ever shone in this world – Jesus Christ! “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:1-9). Later in John’s gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness,



but have the light of life” (John 8:12). Now, as we begin thinking about how Christians are expected to be lights of the world, we would do well to first examine that Light Christians will be trying to reflect – Jesus Christ.

Jesus' life was a bold contrast to the world

When Jesus Christ came to this earth, His life was so different from the world that the greatest way this can be illustrated is the contrast between light and darkness. For instance, when a room is completely filled with darkness, there is no mistaking the presence of a light that begins to shine. It is clear and distinct – and everyone can notice that it is different from all the rest.

This is exactly how Jesus’ earthly life is described by John. Look back at John 1:1-9. You must understand that Jesus was God when He came to this earth (and He continues to be God today). As God manifested in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 Tim 3:16), Jesus Christ showed us what God’s perfect holiness looks like in human form.

The Scriptures are clear that God is perfectly holy (separated from everything that is evil). Revelation 4:8 pictures four magnificent living beings proclaiming God as “Holy, holy, holy....” And, particularly notice the language of 1 John 1:5. “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.” Therefore, because there is no element of sin/darkness that exists in God, verse 6 continues and demonstrates that God cannot be in fellowship with any works of darkness!



As a result of Jesus being completely holy, He could not be involved in any of the ways of darkness. He truly showed a different way of living to the world. 1 John 2:16 identifies that the ways of this world are the ways focused on lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These ways, John says, are “not of the Father” but are “of the world.” Therefore, Jesus’ life was not about these earthly desires. His life was truly one in which He demonstrated what it means to serve God, exercise self-discipline, glorify His Heavenly Father, and love mankind.

Unfortunately, most did not appreciate or gravitate toward this Light. John 3:19-21 explains. “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.”

Darkness hates the light. Light exposes what is going on under the cover of darkness. It exposes darkness for what it really is. In the same way, when Jesus lived on this earth, He exposed the sinful ways of humankind as being sinful. This infuriated those who loved to practice their sin. They did not want to be identified as being involved in wickedness. However, the few who truly had a desire to serve God and be eternally saved recognized their need to come to Jesus so that their wickedness could be exposed and changed.

Jesus was the perfect example of righteous living

Jesus demonstrated God’s holiness to us in two ways. First, Jesus provided the perfect example of righteous living. There was not a single time during Jesus’ earthly life when He chose to fulfill His own fleshly desires rather than accomplish the will of His Father.

Listen to Hebrews 4:15. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” On various occasions, Jesus was tempted to live according to His own fleshly desires rather than please His Father. In fact, He was tempted to fulfill His own fleshly desires in the same ways all other people who were living on earth were tempted – and in the same ways we are tempted. Yet, though everyone else has decided to violate God’s law (sin) in order to fulfill their own fleshly desires (Rom 3:23), Jesus did not!

For instance, Jesus was tempted three times in Matthew 4:1-11. Satan tempted Jesus to use His Divine nature in order to satisfy His own physical hunger by turning stones into bread and demonstrate that He truly was the Son of God. Yet, Jesus refused. Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and told Him to throw Himself down so that God would save Him and demonstrate that He truly was the Son of God. Yet, Jesus refused. And, Satan offered to give Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world without having to suffer in order to establish His kingdom, if He would bow down and worship Satan. Yet, Jesus refused. Though this is just an overview of Jesus’ temptations, you can see how Satan appealed to Jesus’ physical desires. Yet, Jesus consistently and perfectly resisted the temptations. And, He would continue to make the same decision to serve and glorify the Father throughout His earthly life.

This consistent dedication to serving and glorifying the Father is seen through Jesus' earthly life. Jesus demonstrated what it means to forgive. What it means to show compassion. What it means to love. What it means to exercise self-control. What it means to serve. What it means to be patient when experiencing trials, temptations, and persecutions. What it means to give. Every decision Jesus made and every example He has left is a perfect manifestation of God's holiness!

Jesus' teachings perfectly pointed people to righteousness

Jesus did provide a perfect example of righteous living throughout His earthly life. But this was not the only way Jesus demonstrated God's holiness to us. He also was engaged in teaching that perfectly pointing people to God's standard of righteousness.

There are many examples of Jesus' teachings that accomplished this purpose. But there may be none more well-known than Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7. In this one sermon, Jesus revealed a great contrast in the thinking of this world and the holy ways of God.

For instance, consider the section commonly known as the "Beatitudes" (Matt 5:3-12). Jesus said that people would only truly be "blessed" (happy) when they are poor in spirit, when they mourn, when they are meek, when they hunger and thirst for righteousness, when they are merciful, when they are pure in heart, when they are peacemakers, and when they are persecuted for righteousness' sake. To a mind that is only focused on worldly things, this does not make any sense. However, Jesus demonstrates that these are true characteristics of those who would receive spiritual blessings from God!

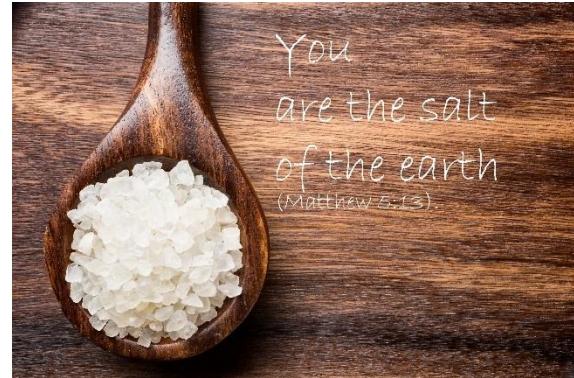
He continued to challenge the conventional "wisdom" of this world throughout His "sermon." He demonstrated failing to treat another person in the appropriate way is just as bad to God as murder. He demonstrated lust after another is just as serious a sin as actually committing adultery. He identified God only approves of divorce for one cause (fornication). He demonstrated God's people must not be vengeful, and they must be willing to love and serve (even those who act in evil ways toward us). He condemned the practices of doing good deeds for others, praying, and fasting to be seen of men. He told people to focus on heavenly treasures (which are eternal) rather than on earthly treasures (which are temporary). He warned people it is impossible to serve two masters, indicating those who truly desire to please God must put God completely first in their lives. He condemned the practice of hypocritical judging. He warned people about false religious teachers who would lead them away from the ways of God. He warned

that pleasing God is about more than merely professing to follow Him. He demonstrated God will only be pleased with those who are doers of His word.

Although this does not cover every point of Jesus' teaching, you can see how Jesus' teaching consistently challenges us to move away from the conventional "wisdom" and ways of this world in order to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Throughout the Scriptures, you will find examples of Jesus' teachings and can observe how Jesus *always* was a stark contrast to the ways of this world and never failed to point people to the Father.

Jesus called His disciples to be the "light of the world"

Another part of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" challenges all those who desire to follow Jesus Christ to see themselves as the salt of this earth and the lights of the world. First, Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matt 5:13). Salt had a variety of different purposes – and it is somewhat difficult to know if Jesus had only one in His mind or if He was speaking of the overall benefit of salt. For instance, some may have considered salt's quality of preservation – and understood Jesus to have been identifying His followers as having the ability to help preserve people in this world from the corruption of sin by pointing them to the salvation in Jesus Christ. Or, some could have considered salt's seasoning effect on food – and understood Jesus to have been identifying His people as seasoning the world with righteousness. Or, perhaps they would have considered a different benefit of salt.



Still, Jesus' overall point is made clear in the second part of the verse. What if His people stop having a positive effect on the world? What good would it be for someone to claim to be Jesus' follower, but not have this kind of positive influence to promote God's righteousness? There would be two negative results: Those who had claimed to be Jesus' followers would be cast away, and the world would be lacking this positive influence for righteousness.

Next, Jesus provides another analogy in verses 14-16. "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.”

As the Light that came into the world (as demonstrated from John 1), Jesus expects His followers to continue providing a stark contrast between the sinful ways of the world and the righteous ways of God. Having ascended into Heaven, Jesus no longer is the example the world sees living around them. Instead, Jesus left this responsibility with His followers. (See Mark 16:15.) His followers were expected to reflect Christ’s light throughout this world – in every place they would go! They were to reflect His example of righteous living. And, they were to teach His message.

Therefore, even though Jesus would not be on this earth forever, His Light would continue to shine through His people. His people would be like a city that is set up on a hill for all to see. They would be like a light put on a lampstand to provide the house with light. There would be no mistaking His people would be different from the world, and they would always be actively promoting the ways of God’s righteousness throughout this world. And, whenever the world would see the good works of Christ’s disciples, some would also choose to devote their lives to glorify the Father in Heaven!

What It Means to Be the Light of The World

Jesus Christ was the greatest Light to ever shine in this world that is full of darkness. As His disciples, Christians must be dedicated to learning Jesus’ light-filled ways and following His holy example. Then, as we have seen, His disciples must also be dedicated to reflecting Jesus’ light for all who are in the world to see today. But what does it mean for you (as one of Jesus’ disciples) to be the light of the world?

You are holy

We have already seen that God is entirely holy (separated from everything that is evil). Now, as one of Jesus’ disciples responsible for shining as a light in this world, you must also be holy. Listen to 1 Peter 1:13-16. “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’ ”

At one time, you lived to fulfill your own physical desires. You have sinned and fallen short of glorying God (Rom 3:23). But now (as a Christian) you are not to live according to those same sinful ways. You must be dedicated to living according to the standard of holiness that is seen in God and Jesus Christ. God says, “Be holy, for I am holy”! As a Christian, God calls you a “saint” (see Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1). A “saint” is any person who has been set apart from the sins he/she has committed and is dedicated to living for the ways of God (a most holy person). But this is not limited to just a few of Jesus’ disciples. This is the responsibility of every single person who follows Jesus Christ – as He expects everyone who follows Him to be entirely dedicated to Him. (See Matt 6:24.)

In fact, notice the extent to which God expects you to imitate His holiness. Jesus’ followers are not permitted to pick and choose areas in which they desire to be holy. Instead, God has instructed you to “be holy in all your conduct.” In every aspect of your life, you must be holy according to God’s standard of holiness. This includes the thoughts you think, the words you speak, and the deeds you do. Therefore, as the light of this world, God does not permit any aspect of your life to consist of darkness (sin). In fact, Paul wrote that those who are Christians must “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” Rather, they are to expose them (Eph 5:11).

“No fellowship” means no participation in a thing. It does not give any “wiggle room” to negotiate any involvement in sinful things. God wants His people to be entirely separated from everything that is sinful – just as He is separated from everything that is sinful. In fact, recall that 1 John 1:5-6 demonstrated that if you choose to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, you cannot have any fellowship with God (who is entirely light). Therefore, you must choose who/what you most desire to have fellowship with.

You stand out from the world

Just as Jesus stood out from the ways of this world, His people (who are entirely committed to His ways of holiness) will also stand out from this world. They will be as easily identified as being different from the world as an illuminated city on top of a hill is identified as being different from all the darkness that is around it! Consider two passages that will help to see this point more clearly.



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

Paul pleaded with those who were Christians by the mercy God had demonstrated for them to give their lives entirely to God. They were to view their earthly lives as being living sacrifices to God that were holy and acceptable to God. Not one element of their physical lives was to be reserved for their own selfish purposes. Everything was to be used in the service of God.

Then, their lives (being entirely given to God) were not permitted to take the same shape as the world. Paul told them not to be “conformed to this world.” They were not to think the same way the world thinks, speak the same way the world speaks, or act the same way the world acts. Rather than living according to the standards and ways of the world, God’s people are expected to be “transformed.” They are to live in an entirely different way. This transformation, according to Paul, involves a renewal of the mind that is focused on following the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God!

Second, consider 1 Peter 4:3-4. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”

Those who are Jesus’ disciples are expected to have been transformed in the way that was depicted in Romans 12. Therefore, the Christian has determined that he/she has spent enough of his/her lifetime living according to the sinful ways of the world. Though he/she has lived for things like lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries, he/she has changed. There has been a transformation. There has been a dedication of his/her life entirely to the holy ways of God and a dedication to leaving the sinful ways of the world behind.

In light of this great transformation, notice how other people will view you (if you have truly become a follower of Jesus Christ). Those who see this difference will “think it strange” that you are no longer practicing the same things you used to be involved with. Most will not understand the transformation. Most will speak evil of your new life that is committed to the ways of holiness. But you should observe the basic fact that those who see your new life in Jesus Christ will recognize that you are different and will see that you stand out from the ways of this world!

You expose others as being in darkness

Whenever Jesus lived on this earth, not only could people see that He was living a different kind of life than all the others around Him were living, but Jesus’ holy life exposed the wickedness. Once again, John 3:19-20 demonstrated that those who loved darkness hated the light because the light would expose their wickedness. Jesus’ life certainly did expose the wickedness of the world through His perfect example and through His teaching (as we discussed previously in this study). Now, as the light of the world, you will also be exposing the wickedness of this world through your example and through your teaching.



First, you expose others as being in darkness through your holy example. Whenever you dedicate yourself to exercising the proper degrees of self-control, patience, love, service, humility, meekness, compassion, etc., you are following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. And, in living according to His holy standard for your life on this earth, you will be exposing those who are not living by that same standard. They will be able to see that they are not dedicated to living according to the same ways you are. And, others will be able to see that they are not living according to the same standard of righteousness.

Second, you expose others as being in darkness when you teach Jesus’ law. Jesus expects you to be teaching His holy ways to others – not just setting a good example of righteous living. Jesus is not living on this earth to physically speak to people who are living in sin. So, He expects you to take His message of righteousness to them. (See Mark 16:15.) In doing so, you will be identifying as sin the same things Jesus identified as sin. And, you will be teaching people to live in the same way Jesus taught people to live. This, too, will expose the ways of darkness as being contrary to the will of God – and will point people to the right ways of God’s holiness.

Consequently, as you shine as a light that is exposing the darkness in the world, many people who are involved in darkness will hate and persecute you. After all, “everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20). Later, Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19). Just as the world of darkness hated and mistreated Jesus (eventually putting Him to death), the world will hate and mistreat those who expose their ways of darkness today. Yet, just as Jesus faithfully endured, you also must endure and continue to let your light shine – recognizing that there is a great reward for those who are persecuted by this world. (See Matt 5:10-12.)

You serve as a beacon of light for those living in darkness

Think about what it is like to wander around in physical darkness. You can't see where you're at. You can't see where you're going. You can't see dangers approaching. You can't see to help other people who are wandering about in the darkness. This adequately describes the spiritual condition of those living according to the ways of the world. They are spiritually lost. They cannot see the great dangers that are rapidly approaching them that they will experience after their earthly lives are over. They cannot see the way out of the darkness. And, they cannot help others who are wandering around in the darkness of sin.



On the other hand, think about what a light accomplishes. When a lamp is lit and placed on a lampstand, there will be one of two possible reactions. First, some will hate the light because they have no interest in seeing what the light wishes to expose and will try diligently to resist the light. Second, others will have their eyes opened and use the light to make the necessary corrections and guide their future steps.

These same points are true concerning those who are Christians. Christians shine the light of God's truth and holiness for those who are in darkness to see. It, as we discussed, exposes the darkness and presents individuals with a choice. Either they can choose to fight against God's light and remain in their sins – or

they can choose to allow God's light to work in their lives so as to use their lives to illuminate the ways of darkness!

Like Jesus, you must choose to show compassion on those who are lost and wandering. Listen to how Jesus viewed the lost in Matthew 9:36. "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion from them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." Recognize that many lost and wandering around you. Then, determine that you will do everything within your ability to let your light shine to serve as a beacon of hope to rescue those who are in darkness!

Let Your Light So Shine

Now that you are seeing the responsibility you have in serving God as the light of the world, I want you to consider some practical applications of this truth. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Being a light for Jesus Christ is not about saying you are a light. It is about actually shining the light of God's holiness in this world that is full of darkness.

Through your speech

You must let your light so shine through your speech. There are standards God has clearly revealed for His people regarding their speech. For instance, Ephesians 4-5 reveals a number of points regarding this standard. You must not lie (4:25). No "corrupt word" is to proceed from your mouth (4:29). All "evil speaking" is to be put away from your life (4:32). Filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting are all "not fitting" for you (5:3-4). Instead, you must "speak truth" (4:25), speak that which is "good for necessary edification" (4:29), be kind (4:32), and give thanks (5:4). Of course, this is only a sample of what God's word teaches regarding your speech. As you live among many people who use their words contrary to the purposes of God, you must be dedicated to glorifying God through your speech.

Through your worship

You must let your light so shine through your worship. First, God wants you to let your light shine by being devoted to worshiping Him. He is "seeking" worshipers (John 4:23). But He is not just seeking any type of worshipers. God is seeking "true worshipers" who "will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). So, as you live among so many worshipers who fail to worship God in spirit and truth, you must dedicate yourself to shine as a light in demonstrating

what true worship really is and encourage others to also follow the Bible's prescription for "true" worship.

Through your teaching

You must let your light so shine through your teaching. As we have already observed in this lesson, God expects those who follow Him to be dedicated to teaching His ways of righteousness. (See Mark 16:15.) You must demonstrate your true love for the Lord and for your fellow man by being actively involved in helping those who are in darkness to learn about the opportunity of salvation through Jesus Christ. While you live in a world that is full of people who are unconcerned about the well-being of their fellow man (especially their spiritual well-being), you must be a lost-soul-seeker.

Through your service

You must let your light so shine through your service. First and foremost, you must let your light so shine through your service to God. In fact, as we saw from Romans 12:1, your "reasonable service" is to present your entire life to God as a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to Him. Then, one of the ways this commitment to serving God will manifest itself is that you will be devoted to serving others according to your opportunity (imitating Jesus' example in John 13:1-17). In fact, Galatians 6:10 instructs you to "do good to all" according to your opportunity – especially toward those who are fellow Christians. Although much of this world is living with a focus on pleasing themselves, you must demonstrate an example of sacrificial service – to God and to your fellow man.

Through your character

You must let your light so shine through your character. God's word of truth prescribes certain characteristics for those who desire to please Him. For instance, Colossians 3:12-17 identifies the characteristics of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with others, forgiving others, love, and thankfulness as being part of living the Christian life. Certainly, the world (generally) does not possess these characteristics (at least not all of them). Yet, since Jesus Christ possessed all of these characteristics, God's people also must possess them – and demonstrate them in their daily lives and interactions with others.

Through your habits

You must let your light so shine through your habits. Every person in this world has habits. Some of these habits are pleasing to God and can help you to serve Him. However, many habits are contrary to His will and can result in your

committing sin. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 instructs you to put everything to the test (using God's standard of truth), hold fast to what is good, and abstain from everything that is evil. This would certainly apply to your habits. The world around you is full of habits that are displeasing to God – i.e., consuming alcohol, using tobacco products, using drugs, viewing pornography, gluttony, laziness, procrastination, etc. In the midst of all this darkness, you must use your habits to help you glorify God and make sure that the only habits others see in you will point them to Jesus' holiness.

Through your clothing

You must let your light so shine through your clothing. In fact, the way you clothe yourself will be one of the first things people will notice about you on a daily basis. In fact, the way you clothe yourself may be the only thing a person learns from you on a given day. Given the Christian's responsibility to clothe himself/herself in a way that will profess godliness with good works (demonstrating modesty, bashfulness, and self-restraint, 1 Timothy 2:9-10), it is important for the Christian to evaluate the message his/her clothing is sharing with the world. The world routinely rejects God's standard for clothing by wearing bathing suits, shorts/skirts that reveal the thigh, tight/form-fitting clothing, clothing that is too low-cut, clothing with inappropriate messages or pictures, etc. Rather than conforming to these worldly standards, the Christian will desire to shine for Christ through his/her clothing.

Through your choices

You must let your light so shine through your choices. The choices you make reveal your priorities. And, other people notice! For instance, the choices you make regarding your entertainment reveals whether you are entirely committed to holiness, purity, and serving God – or whether you are focused on pleasing yourself. The choices you make regarding how often you will assemble with the local church reveals whether you are entirely committed to serving God, keeping His commandments, and fulfilling your role as a member of the local church. Though these are only two examples, the world around you notices the kinds of choices you make. While the world makes choices all of the time that puts themselves first, the world should see the Christian making choices that demonstrate that God comes first in everything (Matt 6:33).

Through your family

You must let your light so shine through your family. God has given you certain responsibilities concerning your earthly family. He has structured the home

in the way that He has desired and in the way that will cause it to function at its maximum ability. For instance, you can read passages like Ephesians 5:22-6:4 to see some instructions for the relationships between husbands, wives, and children. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount,” God has only approved of one cause for divorce (Matt 5:31-32). Though the world routinely rejects all aspects of God’s plan for the family, Christians must be dedicated to fulfilling these responsibilities, thereby demonstrating the kind of family relationships God approves.

Common “Baskets”

In all areas (not just in the areas I have specifically addressed), you must be devoted to letting your light “so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Unfortunately, some profess to be Jesus’ disciples who will live a holy life in secret – but then will dim their lights when they are around others. Jesus speaks of the foolishness of such in Matthew 5:15. “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.” If you want to be pleasing to God, you must allow your light to shine at all times – whenever and wherever you have the opportunity to do so, consistently pointing people to Jesus. But there are some common “baskets” that are used to conceal this light. Let’s briefly consider four.



Shame

Many try to hide their lights due to shame. Many people don’t like to be different from the world. At least, they don’t like to *appear* to be different from the world. They try to blend into whatever environment they find themselves in. Perhaps they are even ashamed of the holy ways of Jesus Christ because they still inwardly desire to live for the ways of sin. Or, perhaps they are ashamed of taking the kinds of bold stands following Jesus requires.

Yet, regardless of the reasoning, God requires that His followers never be ashamed of Him or of His word. Jesus said, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). Rather than being ashamed of Jesus, God’s people must have full confidence in Jesus – knowing that

Jesus Christ loved us enough to give His life for our sins so that we could be eternally saved in Heaven! Like the apostle Paul, you must also declare, “So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom 1:15-16). Jesus Christ was willing to die for you, do not hide your light by being ashamed of Him!

Fear

Many try to hide their lights due to fear. We have already seen that the world will hate those who live according to the holy ways of God rather than the sinful works of darkness (John 15:18-19). Therefore, those who are Christians should expect to be mocked, spoken evil of, and perhaps even physically mistreated. So, rather than choosing to let their lights shine and endure whatever persecution comes, some choose to conceal their lights with the “basket” of fear.

Yet, regardless of what consequences there are for shining the light of God’s holiness in this world, the Christian must be determined never to cower in fear! Listen to the statement Jesus made to His twelve apostles as they prepared to teach God’s message to others and experience persecutions. He said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). Ultimately, there is nothing that man can do to us that is worth the eternal consequence of denying Jesus Christ! Don’t allow your light to dim because of fear.

Peace

Many try to hide their lights in order to “keep the peace.” Now, it is certainly true that Christians ought to be “peacemakers” (Matt 5:9), doing everything within their abilities to live peaceably with others (Rom 12:16). That is, everything short of compromising God’s truth. Unfortunately, many do not let their lights so shine before men (whether in word or example) so that they will not offend anyone else by God’s truth or make anyone else feel bad for living in sin.

Yet, the Scriptures present many examples in which Jesus Christ and His faithful followers were dedicated to standing for what was right even when it meant offending other people. For instance, Jesus taught that the gospel will divide families (implying that not everyone within a family will accept the gospel), in Matthew 10:34-39. Jesus demonstrated His willingness to offend others in order to speak the truth that they needed to hear, in Matthew 15:1-14. And, many of the first century Christians were known by enemies of the gospel as those “who have

turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Though God wants His people to be peacemakers, He never permits you to hide your light in order to “keep the peace.”

Indifference

Many hide their lights because of indifference. Perhaps they were once zealous for the truth of the gospel of Christ. But as time has passed, they have developed an attitude of careless indifference toward living for God’s ways of holiness. “If other people want to live for God, great! But if not, that’s OK.” And, some have become enticed by the ways of sin so as to again fall into Satan’s trap themselves.

Yet, God condemns indifference in those who claim to follow Him. Jesus plainly stated that it is “all or nothing” in discipleship. In Matthew 12:30, He said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” In Revelation 3:15-16, Jesus identified some who claimed to be Christians who were “neither cold nor hot.” Jesus said He would “vomit” them out of His mouth and called for them to be zealous and repent (verse 19). Given everything God has done for you, God calls you to be on fire for Him. (See Titus 2:11-14.) He will not accept anything less than a complete dedication to serve Him!

Conclusion

As a Christian, God expects your life to be used to shine His word of truth and His ways of righteousness throughout this world. You must never be willing to dim your light for anything or anyone. As His image bearer, he wants your light to so shine before men in order that they will see your good works (as you reflect the life and teachings of Jesus) and choose to glorify your Father in Heaven. But how will those around you who are mired in darkness be able to know the righteous and holy ways of Jesus and escape the deadly perils of sin if you are not consistently shining as a light in the world?



Light Lesson 4 Questions

God is Light: A Christian is the Light to the World

Jesus Was the Light of This World

1. How was Jesus' life a bold contrast to the world?
2. How was Jesus a perfect example of righteous living?
3. How did Jesus' teachings perfectly point people to righteousness?
4. What did Jesus call His disciples to be, according to Matthew 5:13-16?

What It Means to Be the Light of the World

1. How will your holiness impact your life as the light of the world?
2. How will you stand out from the world?
3. How will you expose others as being in darkness?
4. How will you serve as a beacon of light for those living in darkness?

Let Your Light So Shine

1. How should your light shine through your speech?
2. How should your light shine through your worship?
3. How should your light shine through your teaching?
4. How should your light shine through your service?
5. How should your light shine through your character?
6. How should your light shine through your habits?
7. How should your light shine through your clothing?
8. How should your light shine through your choices?
9. How should your light shine through your family?

Common “Baskets”

1. How will shame influence people to hide their lights? How can you overcome this?
2. How will fear influence people to hide their lights? How can you overcome this?
3. How will peace influence people to hide their lights? How can you overcome this?
4. How will indifference influence people to hide their lights? How can you overcome this?

Light Lesson 5 –

Children of Light:

Focus: Fixing Our Eyes on Christ

by T. S. Stephens

Introduction

Drivers who notice something in their peripheral vision often suddenly realize they are off the road and moving in the direction of the thing that caught their eyes. Focus is important. There is power in focusing on a task or problem. Some folks with Asperger's Syndrome can hyper-focus on a problem that seems to fail being solved by individuals who are neurologically typical. At other times, this same group will miss the obvious body language cues that everyone else sees. Because God is our light, children of the Light must focus on Jesus, fixing their eyes on Him.

Hebrews 12:1-2 encourages: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” In verses 3-11, the Hebrews author encourages the reader to endure and appreciate God’s discipline and training “that we may be partakers of His holiness.” The Hebrews writer continues to encourage the reader to pursue peace and holiness because without it, we will not see the Lord. The writer continues by instructing to “look carefully” (v15) lest one fall short of the grace of God. The book of Hebrew’s scribe fortifies the reader to “see that you do not refuse Him who speaks” from heaven (v25), but “serve God acceptably with reverence and fear” (v26).



People can focus on many things in this life. Satan will supply many dazzling distractions to try and lead us to the darkness. As children of the Light, we should fix our attention and focus on Jesus. We must be careful of focusing on worldly treasures or earthy ambitions. Matthew 6:22-24 teaches, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness! 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."

Even more important than focusing on the eternal reward God has promised, is the focus on Jesus. He deserves the child of God's focus. Jesus is worthy, and He can show us how to run the race best. It is this kind of focus that helps Christians avoid weariness and losing heart. Focusing on and imitating Jesus improves the Child of Light's ability to cross the finish line as well. 1 Peter 2:21 instructs, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

Fixing the Eyes on Jesus

The Christian starts by understanding **Jesus' stature**. Hebrews 2:10 instructs, "For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Jesus is the very first, the leader, the captain, the inventor of the Christian faith. He is the child of God's hero. His spiritual fitness, His moral strength, His heavenly wisdom, His love for God, and His excellence of character are attributes Christians can completely emulate. By focusing on Jesus, we can see what excellence looks like in vivid detail. This allows the child of Light to be excited about running as well as Jesus ran. Focusing on Jesus helps us to be an excellent Christian, a great parent, great spouse, great employee, and great friend without really focusing on every individual role in life. If we focus on Jesus and practice imitation, then the way we run the race in every part of our life improves.

Jesus demonstrates **His faith** by putting God first in everything, fully trusting in God's plan. Christians must ask: Is God's will the over-riding decision making factor in everything in my life? Focusing on Christ helps us keep God as an all-consuming and first priority. It allows us to trust in the reliable promises of God with simple confidence. The promises of God should motivate His children to become partakers of the divine nature.

Jesus' perspective helps the child of Light understand. Jesus had the joy set before Him. He knew to put long term benefits before instant gratification. He demonstrated how to enjoy life's simple pleasures, such as sharing the Passover with His disciples without laying up His treasure here on earth. This allows the Christian to have confidence in the joys set before them. We must ask: What are my joys in God's kingdom?

Jesus **demonstrated His perseverance**. It helps the child of God understand that they must persevere when life gets tough. All lives have days that

require perseverance. As we look to the scriptures, it makes clear many difficult days in our life happen. Perseverance and hope are connected for Christians. By focusing on the Christ, we can set aside the distractions and frustrations of life as temporary, even momentary light afflictions (2 Cor 4:17-18). By focusing on Jesus, the child of God can see themselves being refined and transformed in service to God. We can see ourselves as growing stronger, not on our own but through Christ. Through God, we can perfect holiness and love in ourselves. God does not teach that His followers will be pampered in this life. Service and persecution are more likely the story. However, the promises of the eternal make these seem light compared to the glory of the weight of eternity.

Jesus' attitude helps us fix our eyes on Jesus. He despised the shame. He minimized the shame in His attitude and looked to the salvation He was providing and His obedience to God. If we must suffer in Christ's name in this life, we should minimize our attention to suffering and focus on the greater good and hope of eternal life. It is easy to let the ups and downs of life's troubles, trials, and temptations cause us to give up. Too many allow life's vacillations to yield resentment against God and weariness of attitude. Christians are reminded not to grow weary in well doing in Galatians 6:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:13. Jesus sets an example under the greatest of trials. He did not allow the suffering of that moment to unfocus His goal of completing His sacrifice for humanity's sin. Christians who focus on Jesus' attitude can maintain humility while glorifying God with their lives.

We might consider Joseph as he spent time in prison. God had given him this dream. His father had already given him a special robe, then he dreamed of the eleven sheaves bowing to his sheaves. Later he dreamed that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed to him. Clearly, his brothers understood this as saying he would reign over them. His brothers hated him so much they sold him into slavery. When sin tempted, he fled. Yet, here he was in prison. How quickly God changed Joseph's place. We can only speculate he had to work to keep the right attitude. A child of the Light might ask: What trials do I let cause my attitude to grow negative or weary as I serve in God's Kingdom?

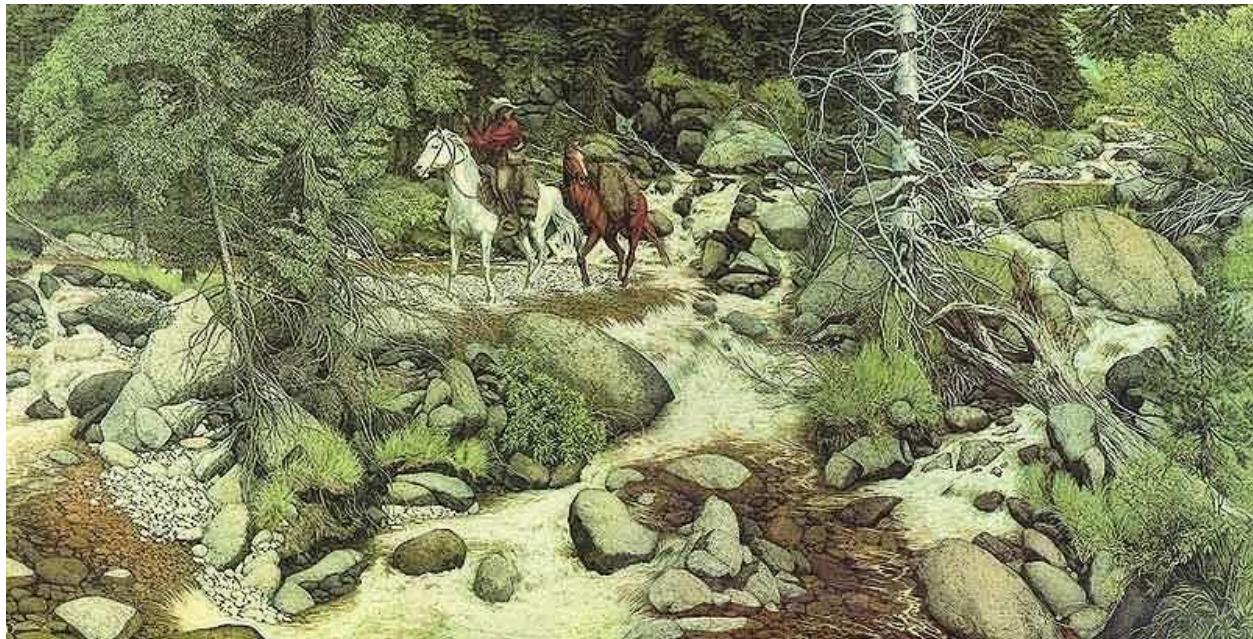
Jesus' reward allows us to fix our eyes on Christ. He has promised to prepare a place for His followers (John 14). Thus, Christians press on for the crown of life for all who have loved His appearing. The church is His bride. He is building a place for His betrothed. We might imagine a soon to be bride seeing a home for the first time that her fiancée is building on part of the family farm. Like that young woman, Christians look to their groom because He has prepared a place

for the church, His bride. Our focus cannot be solely on the reward, no matter how great heaven will be. The child of God is also focused on the Savior sitting at the right hand of God. Christians are “Looking to Thee” and holding to God’s unchanging hands.

Vision and Focus

Vision is about perception, expectation, and attention. Perception and expectation shape human vision. One classic illustration of this is the basketball experiment. The experiment consists of two teams. The teams’ leaders suggest those involved might be asked how many times one team passes the ball or loses it to the other side. The action starts, and balls and players are going all around. In the midst of this, a person in a gorilla suit passes through the scene. Most people never see the gorilla and deny it was there until they see it in a replay. Funny how attention and focus change vision or perception.

Another example is this picture below. As a child, I looked at this every morning in my parent’s home. The artist is Bev Doolittle. What do you see? It is just a guy on a horse coming out of the forest, right? The title of the work is “The Forest Has Eyes.” How many faces can you find? Some might think initially... at least in the mid-teens.



The goal of this lesson is to encourage Christians in their walk in the light of God, and for those who need it a good swift, spiritual kick to the head that alters their reality forever. Christians need to think about seeing the unseen. This starts

with deciding to change the expectation and attention of perception. 2 Corinthians 4:18 reads, “we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.”

Generally, humans are people of vision and eyesight. Eyes and vision guide most in the world. Those who are blind are treated very differently. However, the human brain with the aid of the eyes is what allows us to see. The human brain takes the information provided by the eyes and interprets it to allow a person to see. This involves memory and attention. A person who has never seen a rose might be able to visualize an object without ever having seen it previously. Humans learn to see as children. The brain acts like an interpreting and filtering device. Most of the time, humans have a wide field of view, but often attend to only a portion of what their eyes see. This is focus.

A classic example comes from radiologists. These medical professionals spend years training their eyes and brains to recognize normal and abnormal conditions in the human body seen through various modalities of medical imaging. One study took the opportunity of instructing doctors to look for a specific medical problem in radiographic images. Some had the medical problem quietly hidden in them, and some did not. The analysis showed the medical professional got the diagnosis for each case right in almost all the cases. However, 83% did NOT see the added gorilla placed in the image for the experiment. Expectation and attentiveness for something can cause us to miss something else. (For this and previous gorilla passing through players example see www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2013/02/11/171409656/why-even-radiologists-can-miss-a-gorilla-hiding-in-plain-sight).

In short, there is a difference between vision and eyesight. Humans in court often have higher trust in eyewitness testimony, but as video reviewed cases have illustrated, details are often lost on eyewitnesses. Thus, perception and focus (and memory) are tricky. Perception tricks, coupled with rampant spiritual eye disease, have used sin to blind the hearts of many and can make it difficult for others to see the eternal or focus on Jesus. Focus is the key.

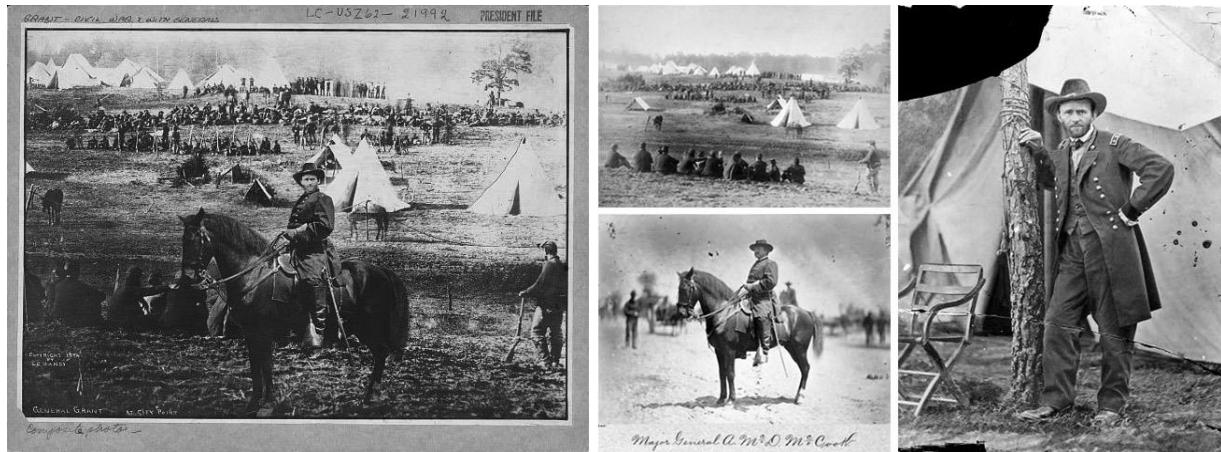
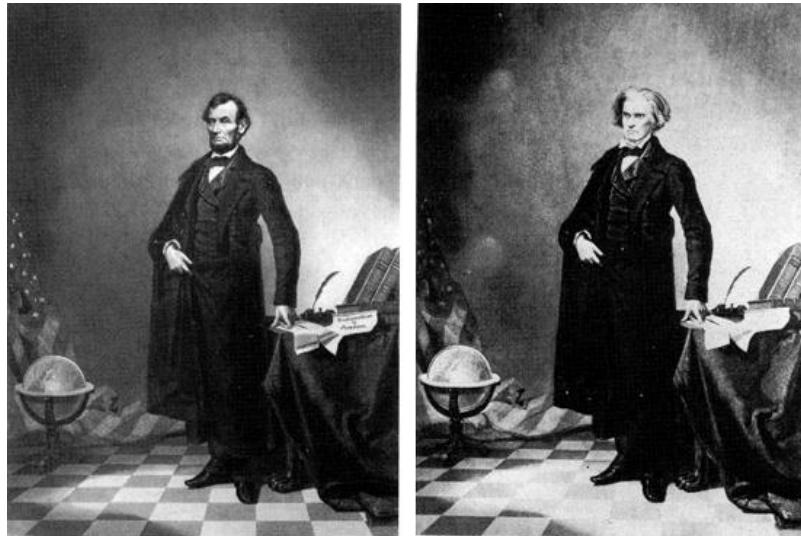
To illustrate, we might consider an example of four siblings. Three decide to prank the fourth sibling, whose name is Leroy. Leroy is up first working on the family farm to stoke the boiler and fill the coal bin. He is having a good day. However, his brothers have plotted against him. Leroy’s oldest brother asks, “Leroy, are you ok?” “Sure.” “Boy, you sure don’t look ok? Sure, you ain’t sick? You look awful peeked?” “Really?” Twenty minutes later, as Leroy crosses paths

with his next brother, he was completing his chore of watering the seedlings. “Leroy, what's wrong with you?” “Nothing,” Leroy responded. “Man, you look horrible, like you've been puking.” “Well, I guess I have been busy today.” Brother three was working with Leroy on a chore fifteen minutes later cleaning up some trash and loading it onto a wagon. “Leroy, I can get this if you need to take a break because you look dog sick.” “Well, I am feeling rough.” Another cycle with the three brothers and Leroy was indeed sick before the call of their mother to lunch. In a matter of minutes, his brother had talked their healthy teenage brother into illness. He was not able to eat lunch and was regurgitating before he made it into the house. In this case, the mischievous power of suggestion caused Leroy to focus his attention and thoughts on how sick he was. The point is focus can yield enough attention to make something a reality, even though a falsehood initially. Perception is tricky, and focus is key.



Consider this classic example of three soldiers. What do you see? Is this a man being held at gunpoint? Or, is this a man being helped? Is this just media manipulation from decades in the past? When we crop a portion of the field of view, the image can be used to tell two different stories. This process of image manipulation has been in use for a long time. We see with the brain, so the brain is filling in lots of gaps. Focus is key to what we see and where we are going. Thus, perception is like many other things where input equals output. Garbage in is garbage out. Thus, we must ask: What do we allow to be put in our heart? Mark

7:21-23 teaches, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.” Focus greatly impacts output.



Lest we think image manipulation is new, we might consider some older examples. This nearly iconic picture from around 1860 in the form of a lithograph of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln is a composite of Lincoln's head and the Southern politician John Calhoun's body. This second print from around 1864 purports to be of General Ulysses S. Grant in front of his troops at City Point, Virginia, during the American Civil War. The head in this photo is taken from a portrait of Grant while the horse and body are those of Major General Alexander M. McCook. The background is of Confederate prisoners captured at the battle of Fisher's Hill, VA. Yes, the images, as well as, what our attention is drawn to has

long been manipulated by depth of field, focus, and filters in photography. What should be the Christian's focus?

We must be careful of depending on our eyes. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends are death (Prov 14:12; 16:25). Christians must learn not to trust their eyes but have faith in God and His righteousness. Thus, children of the Light walk by faith and not by sight. Yes, vision is the great guide for many tasks, but vision can be misfocused or manipulated; or even convinced to be misfocused.

This author's friend, Bob, was twice the author's age when they met, and he often would remark on something as one way or another. His world was largely binary. As Bob used to argue, many things come down to one case or the other. As the old binary joke goes, there are only 10(two) kinds of people in the world. For example, the baby is or is not due in March. So much of the time, life is one of two options. In this existence, there are really two mindsets. That is not to say a person who has one mindset does not dabble or fall into the other at times. A person is either about self or selflessness. A person is either carnal (fleshly minded) or spiritual (eternally minded).

Temporal: The Seen

Being carnal can make us feel smart, enlightened, educated, or whatever; but like sin, it is a deceiver. It can also make us feel puffed up. (Which too often causes folks to start talking about things which they are ignorant. This is often demonstrated as people famous for movies or a sport start expressing expertise in foreign policy or politics.) The carnally minded person can be very wise from a worldly perspective – many are. The carnally minded person is usually focused on self. That does not mean they are completely incapable of caring for others, or even helping and doing for others; but ultimately, they are all about “themselves.” When their desires of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride is not met, then things break down. Often, for many who are carnally minded, they never change over from striving for empty, vain things. It is about the boat, the house, the fancy gadget, trophy spouse, celebrity, or whatever. It is the keeping up with the Joneses mindset.

The self-focused, pleasure-seeking, carnally minded, sin focused mind is ultimately temporary as all of these things results in heart blindness. 1 Corinthians 1:18-24 instructs, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 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? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” Satan often uses people, places, and things to change our focus. Satan is particularly good at changing labels and price tags¹ while manipulating people’s perspective.

There is often a progression to the carnal mindset. Carnally minded people never reach beyond self, and their eternal viewpoint or understanding is darkened. They never add any truth about the eternal. In their ignorance, lasciviousness grows into a life of uncleanness with never-satisfied greed. Their heart is hardened to seeing anything which is eternally minded or spiritually minded as valuable. This is in the extreme, but too common. The result is the blindness of carnality, blindness of the heart to eternity. They can only see with their eyes.

Romans 1:19-24 teaches, “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: 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. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.”

Ephesians 4:17-19 explains the progression of the carnal mindset as “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto

¹ I first heard this expression from Mark Childers.

lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” We must ask: What does or could Satan use to blind me or change my focus from the Christ?

To further see how the carnal mind progresses, we can read 2 Corinthians 4. In verses 3-4, the temporal or self-focused mind is blinded to the gospel by the world: “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.” Verses 5-6 teach the reader that God sent the light in Christ. ‘For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. 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.’ Verses 16-18 teach that although the outward person is perishing the inward spiritual person is renewed through God’s word, while verses 17-18 challenge Christians to contrast the burdens of one’s temporal life (seen) to the glory of the eternal (unseen). The challenge is to change our perspective from the temporal to the eternal, to see the unseen.

Paul now gives the reader the big picture in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we 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.” In the big picture, it is the eternal and not the now. Because humans have such a dependence on vision, Paul admonishes to walk by faith and not by sight.

A very young reader commented on this paragraph, ‘Just like Star Wars.’ Obi-wan Kenobi encouraged his young learner in the movie “Your eyes can deceive you. Don’t trust them.” Christians must be aware that trusting their eyes with the temporal can be dangerous. They must use an eternal prism or a lens of

faith to walk by faith and not by sight. Optometrists often use prism in lenses to move an image to an eye when the eyes cannot align together naturally. The prism of eternity is thus a lens that allows the spiritually minded person to move the eternal into their view.

Some still in darkness grope at the idea of something more but are like brute beasts as Jude discusses. They cling to some guru or some organization. Their sense of the eternal is minimal at best. As an eye care provider that has seen convicts come in for an exam with the handcuffs, waist and ankle chains along with six officers, I can speculate that this is a person who understands by the brutal. Most of humanity never sink this low, but often are still bound by the chains and blinders of sin just the same. The carnally minded must be reminded the ultimate absolute statistic is death or Christ's return followed by judgment. For the carnally minded person to change, they must focus on the eternal and others rather than self. It starts by using the truth to open one's eyes.

In all his wisdom, fame, and wealth, Solomon tried whatever his heart desired under the sun – labor, wine, women, mirth, and song. We might think of all his horizontal relationships. Yet, in the end, he recognized that it was all vanity except for the vertical relationship with God. In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Solomon explains, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.” We can decide the broad temporal path or the narrow eternal path, but there are consequences.

Our focus and attention can easily be distracted in the physical, as well as the spiritual. In Luke 9:62, Jesus warns, “**No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.**” Peter illustrates this point well when he was called by Christ to walk out to Him on the water. Peter’s focus on Christ was distracted by the storm. Matthew 14:29-31 details, “And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Yes, it is easy to allow our focus to be turned from Jesus.

The spiritually minded person realizes their dependence upon God. Ultimately, they look to the eternal in all of life. To the worldly, they are foolish as they see the unseen. They recognize God’s grace and favor. This does not

mean they are not tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. Most spiritually minded folks have been quagmired by these things at some point in their lives. Too often they have been again ensnared by them. Most have been attracted to some flashy trinket or important care of this life. The spiritually minded understand that through Christ, they have thrown off the cruelty of deceptive carnality. Their focus is changed to caring for others, glorifying God, and on heaven as they focus on the Christ. This requires putting off the corruption that is in the world through lust and putting on holiness as children of the Light. This results in values very different than the carnally minded, as such people have an eye of faith looking to the things not seen. The spiritually minded person seeks the eternal. The spiritually minded live this life by striving for purity, serving in humble unselfishness, and giving *agape* love.

The Eternal, the Unseen, and Perfecting of Holiness

The pursuit of holiness defocuses the temporal to focus on the eternal. Children of the Light become partakers of the divine nature. They seek to be holy and perfect it. Abraham was looking for such a city in Hebrews 11:8-10. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 desired a heavenly country that God prepared for them. They had to develop a blindness or learn to ignore the glitters, bells, and whistles of sin. They chose to embrace the love of the Father of Lights. They focused on Christ. Again, Hebrews 12:1-2 teaches, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us 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, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” By focusing on Christ, the Christian focuses and sees things through an eye of faith or an eternal prism instead of the lenses of sin.

In a way that the carnally minded person cannot understand, the spiritually minded find happiness and peace in the hope of the eternal. Nothing else is satisfactory to the spiritually minded person. Politicians lie and fail, even paltering with the truth to deceive. Economies rise and collapse. Leaders come and go. To the carnal mind, the peace of God is silliness or foolishness. To the “enlightened” and “educated” carnal mind, the spiritually minded person of faith is creating deity in their mind. However, for the spiritual person, faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1). Renewing the mind by inputting God’s word and glorifying His name is the spiritually minded person’s focus. It is not about the individual – it is about God. Paul expressed it this way in

Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” The spiritually minded person makes serving and glorifying God the center of their lives. The mindset is not that Christ is just their first priority or the biggest piece of the pie of life, but rather that He encompasses all of life. He is the center cog on which all else moves and exists. “It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me. It is not about me or self. I have given up my rights that I may serve Jehovah.” This is contrary to a self and rights-driven culture.

The progression or transformation of the selfless and spiritually minded person, at war with the flesh, partakes and perfects holiness. 2 Peter 1:3-4 teaches, “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: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Peter continues in 1 Peter 1:14-16 “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” This is the transformation most Christians have studied in Romans 12:1-2.

Christians are free from sin and can bear fruit unto holiness and eternal life (Rom 6:19-22). 1 Thessalonians 4:7 tells Christians, “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” Christians are partakers of divine holiness (Heb 12:10) and should perfect holiness (2 Cor 7:1). Each of these portions of God’s word calls on the Children of the Light to put off lust and on holiness. This is the warfare in which Christians engage: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 explains, “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.” This is why children of God focus on Christ – to see the eternal and perfect holiness in their lives.

With confidence in God’s promises, Christians change. The process starts with the confession of sins and temptations to others who can help. This requires an honest inventory of self. Further, we must be convicted of the seriousness of our sin and the need to be free of it. The Christian can then, like Paul in Romans 1:16-17, not be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto

slavation, even when others shame them as Paul was. As we continue to surrender our life to God's instruction, we continue to grow in our transformation as a child of Light. This should compel the Christian to share the love of God's gospel with others.

The spiritually minded person must recognize their need to help and serve others. Too often, the spiritually oriented person falls off that trail as they are drawn in by the desires of the flesh and of self. This does not mean the spiritually minded person has no physical activities or desires. Or that the flesh is inherently evil. People eat, marry, have children, raise families, grow, sow, reap, and so forth. The spiritually minded are no different as they walk in the flesh, but they do not war after it – that is the distinction. They see the unseen, the eternal. Their goal is an eternity in heaven in the long run, and obedience to God and service in glorifying His name in the shorter term. They focus on Jesus.

Conclusion

The children of the Light have a different perspective than the natural human. They seek to build a life on the eternally significant, pleasing God, living with a perception of the eternal which the natural person cannot see as anything but foolish. The Christian renews their minds from God's instruction. This allows them to use the prism of eternity and an eye of faith to see spiritual things. They understand God has prepared for them. 1 Corinthians 2:9 and 13-14 explain, "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...Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned."



Light Lesson 5 Questions

Children of Light:

Focus: Fixing Our Eyes on Christ

1. Has the temporal/carnal/fleshly blinded your heart to the eternal?
2. Are you progressing toward blindness and having your understanding darkened?
3. Carnal Christian is a false phrase or oxymoronic. Have you defocused the flesh and sought the spiritual and eternal?
4. Are you putting off lust and transforming toward holiness? Will you not seek God? Why should you want to be “partaker of His holiness”? What is your focus in 2020?
5. Is your eye of faith or eternal prism focused on Jesus every day? Do you anticipate His return? Do you work for His kingdom? Are you growing spiritually and perfecting holiness?
6. Do you allow your mind and thoughts to be renewed by His word daily? Do you meditate on it?
7. What other things might be pushing God aside in your life?
8. Has some work of the flesh or some distortion from the devil caused you to focus on the temporal?
9. Why should you fix your eyes on Christ?
10. Considering Mathew 6:22-24, what does it mean to be “single” in reference to our eyes?
11. How does Satan distort our perception of the unseen?
12. What is the danger of trusting our sight instead of walking by faith?
13. What does the pursuit of holiness do to our perception?

Light Lesson 6

Children of Light:

Light to the World Through Service: Towel Bearers

by T.S. Stephens

When Christians think about their light and God's light, one passage that helps is Luke 11:33-36. "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." Clearly, part of the Christian's walk in the light is to share that light through good works to glorify God.

If you grew up in the South, there were a great number of pearls of wisdom in expressions from older folks. "Poor prior preparation produces pitiful performances." "Success starts when those warm, warm feet hit the cold, cold floor." "There is never a right time to do the wrong thing. There is never a wrong time to do the right thing." "If momma ain't happy, nobody is happy." "If it is worth doing, it is worth doing well." "Hoe your own row of corn." Another one that is worth sharing with your children: "Your servant towel should be huge and well used."



Jesus Demonstrated Humility and Service

Jesus demonstrated service and humility while asking the same of His followers. Philippians 2:4-9 (ESV) reads, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." What an Example! "IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?"

Temptations in Service

Henry Nouwen's "In the Name of Jesus" lists three frequent temptations for humans. The first temptation is the desire to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. Many today feel they can handle things themselves and do not need anyone's help. The second temptation is the need to be spectacular with a celebrity mentality. Many people today draw attention to themselves wanting glory for themselves. The third temptation is the want for control and power. Some people have a strong desire to be the one in charge or in control of everything.

In contrast, we should not try to control everything. Servants of the Lord cannot meet most folks' expectations. Therefore, we cannot concern ourselves with who gets the credit but instead seek to give God the glory. As a servant, we should work together for the Lord's kingdom. Whenever we serve, we should seek to do more with others as a team. However, pride and the big "I" are a temptation. As a result, we must remember ensembles are usually better than solos.

Servants should model the Master. Whenever Christians serve, an emphasis on quality over quantity is important. The numbers game is often a temptation to a person's pride. Years ago, there were magnet buttons with the phrase "Jesus is coming. Look busy!" written on them. This probably represents a fourth temptation of hypocrisy and false show.

Servants of God should demonstrate excellence as working for the Lord instead of eyeservice. Colossians 3:22-24 instructs, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." In addition, Proverbs 22:9 encourages, "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor." "IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?"

Greatness

In Matthew 20:25-28, after the mother of the sons of Zebedee asks for positions for her sons, Jesus teaches on greatness. "But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' "Similarly, Luke 18:14 teaches, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who

humbles himself will be exalted.” This is such a contrast to how the world thinks of greatness.

The world’s way of becoming great is much different than God’s. The Word of God teaches greatness is not in a position, a title, an accomplishment, or earthly gain, but it is in becoming a servant. Jesus Himself gave an example of servanthood by humbling Himself to death on a cross. He did not have to do. Two verses later (Matt 20:28), we read Jesus came to earth not to be served but to serve. This concept of greatness is backward from a worldly perspective. Many concepts in the Scriptures are backward from the worldly viewpoint. “To gain your life, you must lose it.” “To receive, one must give.” “To live is Christ and to die is gain.” “To be victorious in battle, one must let God do the fighting.” “To be great, one must first be a servant.” This is not the way the world thinks.

Worldly thinking includes various thoughts on greatness. The Greeks said, “Be wise, know yourself.” The Romans said, “Be strong; discipline yourself.” Hollywood says, “Be sensuous, enjoy yourself.” Education says; “Be resourceful, expand yourself.” Psychology says, “Be confident; assert yourself.” Materialism says, “Be satisfied; please yourself.” Pride says, “Be superior; promote yourself.” Christ says, be a servant; humble yourself by focusing on serving others.

In contrast, consider Jesus. He had no servants yet was called “Master.” He had no published CV or diplomas yet was called “Teacher.” He had no medicine, yet he is called a Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He had no military battles with victories, yet he conquered the world. Jesus’ demonstration of leadership through service is powerful. IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?”

When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet in John 13:4-5, he demonstrated leadership with a towel. When we hold a towel in our hands, we might reflect on Jesus’ example. In the ancient world, there was a custom of washing dirty feet. Often it was a bottom rung servant’s job. It was a dirty and necessary thing as people traveled a great distance by walking. A servant was a towel bearer. A towel bearer is one who is ready, willing, able, and prepared to serve. In the end, the servant’s towel should be huge and well used.



We can explore how this is true in our physical life, as well as spiritually. Richard Foster, a Quaker, expressed the idea by writing, “Service banishes us to

the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial...Therefore, the spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in a position or title, but in a towel.” Towel bearers are servants!

Finding Fulfillment as A Towel Bearer in Service

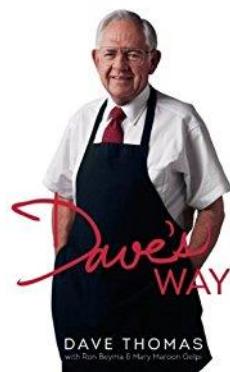
Christians are towel bearers and servants in the Kingdom of God. Towel bearers find fulfillment in this role in several ways. **First, towel bearers find fulfillment in being obedient to God.** One might think of young Samuel attending to Eli as an example of fulfillment in serving. Samuel thought Eli was calling, but it was the Lord. “And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam 3:10).

It is Samuel’s enthusiastic ready to serve attitude that the Christian should have today. The specifics of the assignment should not be key. **Christians should have a ready to serve attitude.** God can use a person in prison as he did Joseph or a king as in David. God also used the blind man in John 9 to His glory, not because of his or his parent’s sin.

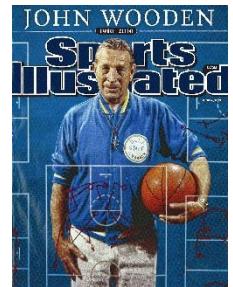
Further, **the assignment or one’s status does not matter.** Do we want latrine duty or to be the personal envoy? We should have the attitude of being ready to go in whatever is needed! The assignment should not matter! Servants find joy in being obedient to God. It is not what God has us do as much as we do what God wants.

Failing to understand His righteousness, folks are too often ready to substitute their understanding for God’s. He calls the children of light to be servants (Eph 5:8; Col 1:12). Dave Thomas of Wendy’s is famous for appearing in corporate materials wearing an apron and mopping floors. He defended his appearance in the corporate materials. It was not a photo-op or a stunt. He had learned his craft at an upscale restaurant. Waiters had to apprentice for a job. Waiters made their living solely on tips. They operated as a team. This was where he developed his MBA program. He called it a “Mop Bucket Attitude.” Similarly, servants of God must make sure their servant towel is bigger than their ego. “[Speaking of servant towels], ego is the anesthesia that deadens the pain of stupidity” (Rick Rigsby). Pride is the burden of a foolish person.

The story of Wendy's and its founder.



At this writing, basketball's two most winning coaches are John Wooden and Pat Head Summitt. Even after having won multiple national championships, John Wooden took a broom to the gym floor at UCLA. He impacted people by serving using a hard work attitude. Christians must get their broom out to impact people. Mops and brooms influence people! Christians attract people to God's kingdom through service.



Similarly, Pat Head Summitt was another great basketball coach. She had a reputation for driving her players hard to excellence. She started her program when woman's basketball was an afterthought at the college level. She developed her team, drove the van, and washed the uniforms. Her hard work created and built the program. Many would even say Coach Summitt's woman's basketball program helped grow women's college basketball. By working hard, she built the program others would seek to rival. Her 1,098 wins and many national championships remain a standard of excellence. A bronze statue is outside the basketball arena at the University of Tennessee where the court is named in her honor.



Examples of service can inspire as Wooden and Summitt illustrate, but even more so in God's kingdom. People are drawn to strength at the bottom when one has humbled themselves before God. Thus, if you cannot use a mop, then you might try the broom. If a mop and broom do not work, then try a towel! "IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?"

Second, servant towel bearers find fulfillment by taking on the nature of a servant while imitating the divine nature, specifically humility. The fact that Jesus humbled Himself and made himself nothing tells us He took on the mindset of a servant. In John 13, Jesus not only spoke about being a servant, but He showed what it is to be a servant. As you read verse 3, you understand Jesus has power. With meekness (strength under control), he became a servant. This is a lesson of love. Verses 4-17 read, "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands

and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. 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. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The Master of the universe humbled Himself to wash dirty feet. He served using His towel! "IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?"

Christians are not greater than their Master. If we are going to do a job, then we should do it right. Sometimes we try to use past failures to excuse ourselves. However, past failures are another expression for learning opportunity. Christians must seek God's wisdom because no one is going to be smarter than God, no matter how much we try to justify ourselves. The spiritually minded person builds a life on Christ that stands in the storms of life. If the Son of God served, then the children of Light should follow that example (1 Thes 5:4-5).

Third, servant towel bearers find fulfillment in taking time to serve. Colossians 3:17 teaches, "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." Verses 23-24 read, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." When Christians are willing to use their precious time to minister to the needs of others, then they find fulfillment in service to God.



Everyone has the same amount of time today. Everyone is busy most days with work, school, children, home, etc. Many are overwhelmed in that process. Sometimes, folks are too busy to serve others because they forget to allow for such things. It seems the more rushed we are, the more likely we cannot help those in need along our path. Everyone is busy. Everyone has very busy schedules.

However, when we take the time to minister to others, God is glorified. It is difficult in a self-centered world to remember: “It is not all about you, but God!” If we were making a list to encourage our children, we might write: Be careful of too many commitments. Time management is hard. Serving others is God’s definition of greatness. The servant towel lights the way for people to Christ. “IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED IN GOD’S KINGDOM?”

Fourth, servant towel bearers find fulfillment in pointing people to Jesus. In essence, towel bearers reflect and carry God’s light in service to a dark world. 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 explains, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. 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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Towel bearers represent Jesus Christ to the people whom they serve. Jesus explained the child of God’s role in Matthew 5:14-16, “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.” As Christ’s workmanship, Christians are told they are created unto good works (Eph 2:10; 2 Tim 3:17). The reason for service is to glorify God. Reflecting God’s light and love is the goal of every towel bearer; so, they might point others to God and Christ.



Many people in the world today are tired of hearing people talk about Jesus or calling themselves “Christians.” They want to see someone who shows they are a Christian. The way we show our faith is by being a servant. It is one of those expressions; seeing is believing. “IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?”

Fifth, servant towel bearers find fulfillment in God’s promise to reward them. It is not that one earns heaven; for those saved are saved by God’s grace. With work, there is a need for patience. Weariness in our service can come from the need to be renewed from an eternal perspective.

In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the five and two talents persons were told, “His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord (Matt 25:21).” However, the one talent person received another response in Matthew 25:26-30. “His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful

servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strayed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The one who did not use his talents was cast into darkness. Children of the light need to exercise the opportunities and skills before them in service to God. “IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?”

Perhaps everyone has had times when they felt unappreciated for the service they provided, maybe feeling like nobody notices the little things they do for others. God notices. We may feel like nobody knows the things we do for the Lord, but He has a reward waiting. The things we do matter to God. (See also Mark 12:41-44.) His servants matter to Him. The smallest light shines brightly in the darkness. Others best see God’s love and light by service. The specifics of that service vary by person and situation, but it is an important way one can share God’s light and love.

Sixth, servant towel bearers understand the difference between good intentions and action. Uzzah probably had good intentions in 2 Samuel 6, but it was the wrong action. In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul spared sheep to sacrifice, but he should have destroyed in obedience. Often, we may have good intentions but fail to follow with action or the right action. Further, we can overlook many in need. American society is full of disconnected people – frequently lonely. Yes, they have social media “friends” and such, but Americans are the most connected disconnected people in history. Jon Bloom expressed it this way, “Since the fall of man, people had trouble staying focused, but today in an age of unprecedented



distraction, lots of experts are talking about the negative effects this is having on us. Many of us feel it: the buzzing brain, the attention atrophy, the diminishing tolerance for reading, especially books. We're becoming conditioned to distraction, and it's harming our ability to listen and think carefully, to be still, to pray, and to meditate. Which means it is a spiritual danger." Servant towel bearers not only intend to serve, but they complete the action and seek to recognize opportunities.

Conclusion

"IS YOUR SERVANT TOWEL HUGE AND WELL USED?" The servant towel bearer finds fulfillment in obeying God. The towel bearer finds fulfillment in taking time to serve others and enjoys the role of a servant in imitating Jesus. Knowing God's promises, the

towel bearer finds fulfillment in sharing God's light and pointing others to the Lord. The children of light must make sure their servant towels are huge and well used. Service, as a form of love in the name of God is something everyone can see and understand, even the blind. Christians are to shine as lights when doing good works to glorify their Father.



Light Lesson 6 Questions
Children of Light: Light to the World Through Service:
Towel Bearers

1. What are some temptations in service?

2. Explain “Greatness.”

3. What examples did Jesus set in washing dirty feet?

4. How does one find fulfillment as a towel bearer in service?

5. What does service to others cost the one serving?

6. Is your servant towel huge and well used?

Light Lesson 7

Children of Light:

Opening the Eyes of our Hearts

by Bryant Bailles

Introduction

Have you ever seen something worth an enormous amount of money that looked like junk to you? I remember walking into an art museum and seeing one of their prized works: a large, empty canvas with a single tear going down the center. I remember being shocked and disappointed that something anyone could easily replicate was being heralded as extraordinary. Even if it had been offered to me for free, I would have thought I was being offered someone's garbage.

Despite how I saw it, my view was clearly not the determination of the value or importance of that piece of art. What do you think is the difference between someone who could appreciate it compared to my view? When we set our eyes on that canvas, we saw the same thing in two very different ways. I quickly walked away, disappointed and frustrated, while others would stand for some time and think deeply in ways triggered by the work. They may even have had a profound realization that could potentially change their perspective in some way that I did not experience simply because my way of thinking was not aligned to value it as they did.

Someone may have seen the work differently because they took the time to consider the artist and his or her intentions behind the work. Or, they may have had a life experience that caused them to connect to the message communicated by the work—even if it was not the message the artist intended to send. Whatever it was, I did not see what they were seeing.

The Nature of Parables

In Matthew 13, Jesus began to teach many things to the crowds in parables, which became a common form of teaching in His ministry. Parables, by definition, are used to illustrate something profound and difficult to grasp by comparing and relating it to things that are simple and common. For example, in Matthew 13:3-9, Jesus speaks of a sower who was throwing his seed onto different soils, which affected the seed's development differently. Initially, Jesus gave no explanation and made no



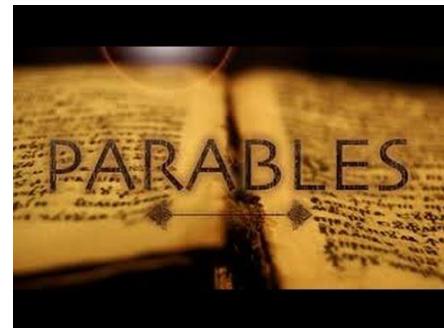
indication that this simple story was key to understanding the glory of God's eternal kingdom.

In Luke 2:46-47, even at twelve years old, Jesus was able to amaze the teachers of Jerusalem with His understanding and answers. In Matthew 7:28-29, the crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching. In John 7:46, officers sent to seize Jesus told those who had sent them, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." In Luke 24:32, two disciples whom Jesus had "explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" said, "were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

If Jesus had such mastery in His understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures so that He could easily amaze even the most well-studied student of God's word, why would He choose to frequently teach in a way that was so simplistic and unattractive? The disciples asked the same question in Matthew 13:10. Jesus explained to them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from

him. **Therefore I speak to them in parables;** because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.' " (Matt 13:11-15, NASB).

Jesus' parables were like that ripped canvas. Some would come to Jesus hoping to hear or see something spectacular, only to be disappointed by what seemed to be simple, meaningless short stories. While they would walk away unchanged, others would see God's kingdom in an entirely new light. What causes such a dramatic difference?



Seeing the Teacher

Notice Jesus' first statement in explaining why He taught in parables. "To **you** it has been granted to know..." Who is the "you" Jesus is speaking to? He was answering *the disciples* who came to Him seeking an understanding of the parable of the sower. "They" who were fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy were those who were not disciples.

Why would being a disciple of Jesus make such a difference in how His parables would be received? Having developed knowledge and respect for the artist behind the ripped canvas would have caused a totally different way of seeing and valuing that work. So many works of art that could easily be replicated have value because of the person who created them. So often the value of things that seem common transforms completely because of the person they are associated with.

It is so important to understand what led so many disciples to dedicate themselves to following Jesus. In John 1:34, John the Baptist testified of Jesus, "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' He then also said that Jesus was, "the Son of God." And in verses 35-36, John sees Jesus and calls Him "the Lamb of God." Because of this testimony from John, Andrew follows Jesus and tells his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah." Philip, another disciple, found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." When Nathanael came to Jesus, he confessed of Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

Since the time Jesus began His public ministry in Matthew 4:17, His core message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." They saw Him heal the sick, cast out demons, heal lepers, and even raise the dead (Matt 11:4-5). However, in Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus spoke of those who saw these things but were still unimpressed and unsatisfied. In Matthew 11:20-24, He further spoke against "the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent." To those whose spiritual eyes had been opened by Jesus, His parables would open their eyes further to see the glory of His kingdom. To those whose eyes were still blind through refusal to repent, His parables would only blind them further.

What I see in Jesus' parables is ultimately a reflection of how I see Jesus Himself. If I see Jesus as He truly is, then I can know His teaching, in whatever

form it takes, holds truths of greater value than any earthly thing. I become both willing and capable to meditate on the stories of the parables and how they relate to and reveal the greater spiritual realities Jesus came to embody and represent.

Seeing Myself

But parables are not just about seeing Jesus and His kingdom; they reveal your own condition as well. Notice back in Matthew 13:15, the final part of Isaiah's prophesy that is quoted says that if "they" understood with their heart, they would "return, and I would heal them." Those disciples who had repented had been convicted of their sins did so through believing that His words both revealed spiritual deadness and gave spiritual life. As Jesus said when eating among sinners in Matthew 9:12-13, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."



Jesus' first parable in Matthew 13 even speaks to this end. When Jesus explains the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:18-23, He reveals that the four soils are four heart conditions, and each receives the word differently. These truths do not just equip me to understand the conditions of the heart that exist in others, but it helps me to understand the condition of my own heart.

A brilliant component in this teaching is that I am given the option of whether or not I will associate my own heart with any of these conditions. This not only challenges how honest and open I am willing to be with myself and with God but also whether or not I have been humbled to appreciate how corrupt the condition of my heart has become by my sin. To see God's glory more clearly, I need God to dramatically change my heart.

In Mark and Luke's account of the same parable, Jesus immediately follows His explanation in Luke 8:16-18 by saying, "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and

whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.” Meditate on that thought for a moment.

In Psalm 139:23-24, David applied this same principle when he said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.” How are you listening? Are you willing to give God permission to search through your heart, as a lamp gives light where there was once darkness? Parables are the means through which our hearts are refined and purified by coming to see and search my heart as it is seen and searched by God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matt 5:8, NASB).

The Eye is the Lamp

In Luke 17:20-21, when the Pharisees came to Jesus asking when the kingdom of God was coming, “He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” If the kingdom of God was in their midst, why could they not see it?

In Luke 11:33-35, Jesus uses the same illustration He used after He taught the parable of the sower, of the lamp being set on a lampstand. But here He then continues further and says, “The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body is also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illuminates you with its rays.” As difficult as it is to grasp or define what exactly Jesus means here, Luke immediately follows this teaching with an interaction that serves to illustrate it.



In Luke 11:37-38, Jesus dines with a Pharisee who is shocked when **he sees** that Jesus did not ceremonially wash His hands before the meal. His shock at seeing this reveals something deeper that Jesus then speaks to—“Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also?” (Luke 11:39-40, NASB).

Because the eyes of the Pharisees were bad, they were filled with darkness and could not recognize the glory of the kingdom of God even while it was right

before them. The problem was not that the kingdom of God was not apparent enough or that it was not being made clear enough by Jesus. The problem was the Pharisees were totally blind because of the darkness within them. But what caused their eyes to be so blind?

The Pharisees were so focused on the external; they could not perceive what was spiritual. When Jesus ate with a Pharisee, the Pharisee was shocked when he saw Jesus did not clean His hands ceremonially, but yet he was not shocked at the exposure of how unclean he was in his heart. The Pharisees presumed they were living embodiments and examples of God's Law. Whereas the intention of that Law had always been to expose the reality of the enormity of the corrupting power of sin, in order to lead to the heart to which the parables appealed. If I understand, as Jesus said, when my eye is bad my body is "full of darkness," then I in shock and horror can exclaim like Paul in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

Can't You See It?

But being blind to things of the heart and the Spirit was not just a problem someone like a Pharisee had. After miraculously feeding four thousand people in "a desolate place," Jesus and His disciples get on a boat with only one loaf of bread. When Jesus then warns them to watch out for the "leaven" of the Pharisees and of Herod, they argue about the fact they have no bread. Jesus challenges them, saying, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?" (Mark 8:14-21, NASB).



Jesus proceeds to admonish His disciples that there was more they should have been seeing from His miracles. Just like the Pharisees, their focus was still set on the wrong things even though they had previously experienced the kind of convictions that should have caused their eyes to be completely open! But like the parables, it would be so easy to take for granted there are greater, more permanent lessons intended in Jesus' miracles that are meant to open my eyes and change my heart. If all we see when Jesus miraculously feeds thousands of people is a confirmation of His deity and evidence of His compassion, our eyes have not been opened either.

It is not just that Jesus taught in parables; it is that all of Jesus' works were living parables. Jesus' intention in feeding the crowds was meant to radically change their "eye." His intent was to shift their concerns from their personal, physical needs and to put their focus on the greater urgency of spiritual needs. In Mark 8:19-20, Jesus forced them to think again about the feeding of the crowds because they still had not truly seen those miracles despite experiencing them so intimately.



How about you? Did you realize you were meant to be so deeply changed by those two miracles? Did you see it? If we can learn to wrestle with parables and be inwardly, permanently changed by the lessons God opens our eyes to see, we can see and follow Jesus "with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord," and be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18, NASB).

Can the Blind Get to Heaven?

Paul, to the church in Corinth further said, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.

The times we have seen Jesus referring to the blind have been those whose minds the "god of this world has blinded." If you are blinded by the values and pleasures of this present life, then the value and glory of eternal life will be impossible to see as reality. If you cannot see God's righteousness reflected in His Son, you will never see your unrighteousness in a way that will cause you to have a broken and contrite heart. If you cannot see in yourself thoughts and motives deserving God's judgment and wrath, you will not see the glory of His own thoughts and motives He offers to replace them. If you cannot see the vast glory of discovering greater heights of God's kingdom through the simplicity of Jesus' parables, then you cannot see at all.

In Revelation 22:4, God promises those who are with God eternally will "see His face." But it is not just a fact they will see His face; they had already been

living in the light of His face reflected through their Lord Jesus Christ. As David said so long ago, “One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, and to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple. When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You,” Your face, O Lord, I shall seek.” (Psa 27:4, 8, NASB).

May God help us to meditate on Jesus’ parables in a manner that causes us to behold the beauty of His face and further seek to dwell with Him where He is, as He is.



Light Lesson 7 Questions

Children of Light: Opening the Eyes of Our Heart

1. Why are things we often value the most not seen as valuable by others?

2. What did Jesus mean in Matthew 13:12?

3. What lessons are in the two parables in Matthew 13:44-46?

4. Explain Matthew 13:52.

5. What does Jesus mean when He calls the eye the lamp of the body?

6. In Mark 8:14-21, what lessons were the disciples meant to take from Jesus' miracles in feeding the crowds

Light Lesson 8

Children of Light:

Men as Trees: Between Two Blind Men

Coming to Terms with Discipleship

by Mitch Stevens

Introduction

Do you remember the story about the time Jesus took two attempts to heal someone? It involves the blind man in Bethsaida, which appears only in the Gospel of Mark.

Read Mark 8:22-26. It's an unusual story, isn't it? If we didn't know better, we might say it's an *embarrassing* story. Why did it take Jesus two touches? Did He not have His Wheaties that morning? This miracle resembles a visit to the optometrist: "What's better, one...or two?" That is *if* we didn't know better. But Jesus is *always* in power and on purpose. Everything He does is on task and for a reason. This *is* an unusual miracle story, but as Jesus told the blind man to look around and look again, WE need to look around and look again. The miracles of Jesus were enacted parables. They not only demonstrated God's power and goodwill for man, but they often illustrate something about the surrounding situation.

Mark's Gospel fully utilizes this teaching technique by bracketing the entire central travel narrative of the book between two blind-man healing stories—the blind man in Bethsaida and blind Bartimaeus in Jericho. In between is the narrative of the Journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus delivers some important teachings about discipleship. Each of the blind healing stories provides a commentary on the failures and growth of the disciples in understanding their Savior.

No other Gospel dwells so much on the questioning, bewilderment, and misunderstanding of the disciples as Mark does. They are truly slow to come around—but that's easy for us to say! They were the ones having to come to terms with God in flesh working out redemption among them. We probably wouldn't have done any better. In fact, as enriched as we are, we often don't. That's part of why Mark presents the story the way he does.

Blurred Vision: Healing by Stages

As we approach the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida, the apostles are coming away from the second feeding of a crowd of thousands in the wilderness. However, they just ... aren't ... getting it. The apostles had gained no insight from the feeding of the 5,000, and their heart was hardened (Mark 6:52). Jesus rebuked them privately for their lack of understanding about what causes sin (Mark 7:18). Then, with the feeding of the 4,000 in Mark 8, they acted as Jesus had never miraculously fed hungry people before. Were they *that* forgetful, or did they perhaps think, "Surely He would not do that for a crowd of *Gentiles*...?"

Starting at Mark 8:14, the apostles are sailing into Bethsaida with Jesus. Every boat trip in Mark is significant to the disciples and their relationship to and understanding of Jesus. The first example is found in Chapter 4 when Jesus calmed the storm; the second is in Chapter 6 with Jesus seen walking on water. The trip to Bethsaida is the third, where there is a discussion about the meaning of the loaves from the last miracle. Apparently, it was supposed to turn on some lights, and it didn't.

Read Mark 8:18-21. All of this is building up to Peter's great confession in Mark 8:29: "Oh! You're the Christ!" This should have occurred to them all from the first time He made bread! It *certainly* should have dawned on them after the second time. Jesus asks, "*Do you not yet understand?*" They were not taking what they had been shown about Jesus' power and applying it toward their present concerns. Here they were acting like Israel did when they complained about water just days after seeing God's power to part the waters of the Red Sea. Jesus just fed 4,000 people! Why were they worried about having no bread? They couldn't see past the immediate problem. Their vision of the recent past was fading. In losing sight of what Jesus *had* done, they were in no position to look forward with trust at what Jesus *could* do for them. It is very easy for any of us to become so spiritually near-sighted as to be blind to the important details in the distance.

Next, we arrive with the disciples in Bethsaida (Mark 18:22-26). The healing of the blind man in Bethsaida is an illustration of the disciples' own inability to see. Was the blind man healed on the first touch? Yes—by some measure. Before, he couldn't see *at all*. After the Lord's first touch, he was beginning to get the shape of things...but his vision was still fuzzy. This means of healing is very hands-on for the Lord. However, this method of using saliva like a salve would actually have made some sense to the man and anyone watching from the village. There were both medical and magical beliefs about the use of saliva in this time period. Jesus was “speaking their language” and in a way playing to expectations.



This healing was a very parental kind of ministration, performed on someone who needed to be walked through the process every step of the way. Think about it this way. If you have a teenager and he comes in with dirt smudged on his face, you fix the problem by saying, “Go wash your face.” You fix it with a word. If your 3-year-old comes in with dirt smudged on his face, you say, “Come here!” And if you’re anything like the moms I know, you lick your fingers and start wiping the kid’s face yourself—gross, but effective. This blind man was spiritually more like the 3-year-old.

How does this healing serve as a parable of the disciples’ own failure to understand? James A. Brooks comments, “The disciples, like the blind man, had been ‘touched’ by Jesus and had received a preliminary blessing. Their spiritual insight, however, was far from complete. They too needed a second touch.”² There is a valuable reassurance for all of us in this sign act of Jesus. “This two-stage miracle also shows us that Jesus will not give up on us. He who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6).”³ “This two-stage miracle is not just about the gift of sight. It is ultimately about the gift of

² James A. Brooks, *Mark*, New American Commentary, Vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 133.

³ Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 134-135.

perception...Implicit in this parable is one of the boldest claims ever put forward about Jesus: Jesus can confer the gift of making sense of what we see.”⁴

Getting a Clearer View: The Path of Discipleship

Now consider what immediately follows: *Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?”* (Mark 8:27, NASB). Peter finally sees it: “*You are the Christ*” (v 29)! “*And He warned them to tell no one about Him* (v 30). The great confession episode ends like the healing miracle: “Go home. Don’t tell anybody yet.” Jesus is planting seeds. Given time, they will sprout. But they need to germinate a bit.

Peter’s confession is the turning point of the gospel. Everything before this leads up to it, and everything after works off of it. It tells us that the disciples are starting to see!

This is a point WE must reach, too. Every disciple of Christ starts with an initial faith commitment: “I’ve heard a lot of things, but you are the Christ! And now I put my life into that truth!” This is the essential place to start. Once He becomes your Savior, the work of getting to see clearly continues. You’ve experienced what He will do to save you. As a disciple, you now must sharpen your focus on how Christ will complete that work in you even as you work with Him in saving others. Before the Lord is done, He’s going to work you through *everything* it means to call Him “Lord”—including all the “fuzzy” things which you don’t yet understand. We must go from seeing the world around us as imposing, impersonal things moving around—like, say, walking trees—to sharpening our focus to see the lost souls living their lives without a Savior.



A pattern emerges from Mark 8:31 onward. It appears right around the same places in Chapters 8, 9, and 10.⁵

1. Jesus predicts His death, burial, and resurrection.

⁴ Ronald J. Kernaghan, *Mark*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 153.

⁵ Allen Black, *Mark*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 153f.

2. The disciples misunderstand. They don't see His kingdom as He sees it. They're expecting to be made heads of state in the new regime!
3. Jesus teaches them about the true meaning of discipleship: "Take up My cross and follow me." Rather than thinking about how they were going to advance their positions through Him, they needed to be thinking about discipleship as a process of self-denial (Black).

Bit by bit, the Lord revealed Himself and His teaching, and it was *still* a process for the disciples to see it (Mark 8:31-35). Witnessing the heavenly glory of Jesus, the disciples "did not know what to answer; for they became terrified" (Mark 9:6). They had convoluted discussions about plain statements (Mark 9:9-10). There was a demon-possessed boy whom the disciples couldn't heal (Mark 9:19); Jesus told them they needed to pray more (v 9). Then he told them a **second** time of His death, burial, and resurrection (Mark 9:30-32). They were afraid to ask Him about it, so instead they argued again about who would be in charge. Mark follows this with Jesus teaching them about compassion and child-like dependence (Mark 9:37; 10:15-16). Then He told them a **third** time of His death, burial, and resurrection (Mark 10:32-34). And what follows? James and John start lobbying for cabinet positions! The other disciples get upset, not because James and John could ask for such a thing, but because they wanted it too! "Hey, WE want to be on the right hand!"

"... but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45, NASB).

We began in Mark 8:31 at the turning point of the whole gospel. **Verse 45 is the central idea of the whole Gospel.** As He gave Himself up, we've got to give ourselves up.

Vision Before Healing: A Ready-Made Disciple

And now we come to the other bracketing miracle: another blind man to heal. The remarkable thing about this healing is how much this blind man sees *before* the fact!

Read Mark 10:46-52. “Son of David” is a messianic title. It’s amazing what this blind beggar managed to piece together without the benefit of handing out bushels of miracle-bread, walking on water, and gaining personal experience casting out demons. In the Gospel of Mark, Peter at the start of this section and Bartimaeus at the end of this section are the only humans who address Jesus with a messianic title.⁶ When Bartimaeus tosses aside his cloak, that is the behavior of someone about to get to work—to run a race or start a fight! This man was *already* casting his old life away! *Rabboni* (v 51) means “My Master” or “My Teacher.” There is no healing word or touch here.



There is simply Jesus’ declaration that Bartimaeus’ faith has ‘saved’ him—a verb (*sōzein*) that can refer to both physical and spiritual healing (even ‘salvation’)…“More important than the restoration of Bartimaeus’ physical sight is his spiritual insight into [who Jesus is].⁷

Instead of going anywhere else, Bartimaeus followed Jesus. And Jesus was going up to Jerusalem—up to the cross, to His death, burial, and resurrection.

“Which Is Clearer, One ... or Two?”

Compare and contrast these two healing stories for yourself.

- How do the miracles play out? _____

- What are the end results? _____

The first story lies at the beginning of a journey. It reminds us it will take some time to absorb the idea Jesus is the suffering Messiah. The second story shows us that in order to follow Him, we must follow Him to the cross.

⁶ Ben Witherington, III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 292.

⁷ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*. Sacra Pagina, Vol. 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 318, 320.

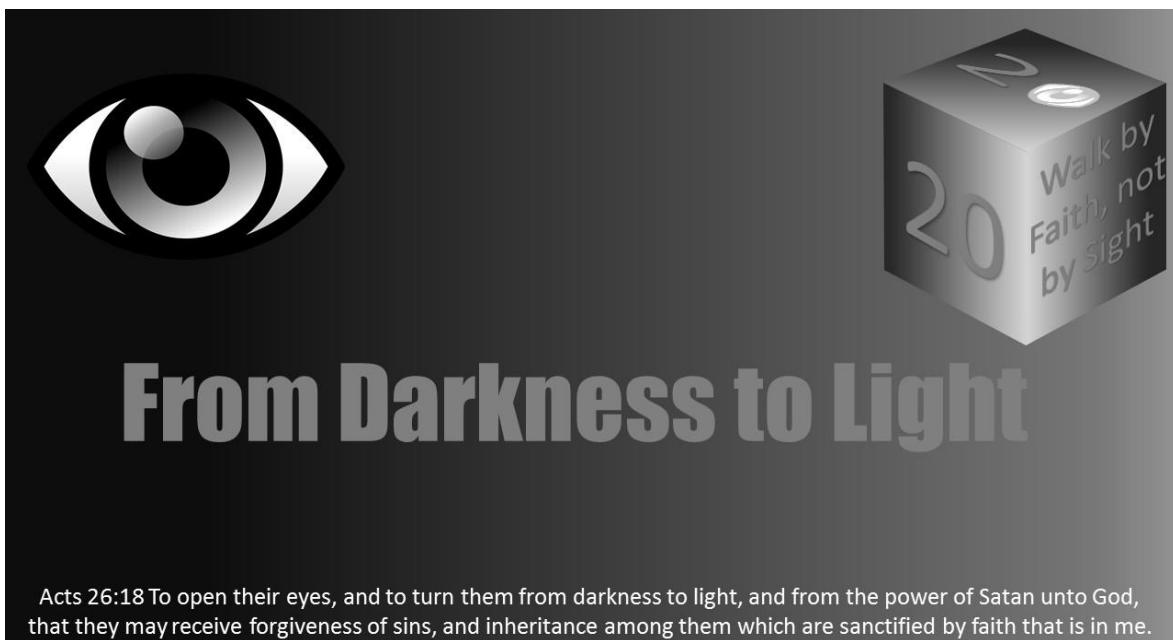
Conclusion

Sometimes things start out looking blurry. There's a lot we don't understand, and we need to look again. In order to see clearly, we need to travel the way with Jesus. Our faith must grow as we let go of our own selves and our own fuzzy, shortsighted viewpoints.

The story about the time it took Jesus two "tries" to heal somebody wasn't a failure on His part—it is a blessed assurance! How many times has He touched *your* life and said, "What do you see? Now look again..."? Even now, how ready are you to see? Jesus asks, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

Are your answers vague and self-centered? Do you find yourself repeating the same simple lessons over and over again? How many times do we have to read the testimonies of Jesus feeding multitudes and opening blind eyes before we start connecting the dots in our own lives in order to stop worrying about bread and wringing our hands about our inadequacies for spiritual service? If you know these stories inside and out, are you able to apply them to your eyes? Can you look through them to trust what Christ is able to do with your own trials and troubles?

May your cries for the Savior to give you clearer sight grow in maturity from Bethsaida to Bartimaeus!



Light Lesson 8 Questions

Children of Light: Men as Trees Between Two Blind Men Coming to Terms with Discipleship

1. In what ways does the Gospel “meet us where we are”?
 2. Why do you think the apostles had such a hard time understanding what Jesus was trying to tell them? What is the application to us?
 3. Is there some truth or life lesson that took a long time and repeated applications for you to finally see? Provide an example.
 4. Was your own conversion more like the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida or like the healing of Bartimaeus? Why do you think so?
 5. We often have some spiritual vision or perception, but we too often need to clear it up. Sometimes, Satan is smearing distractions on our lens of faith. Sometimes, we need to mature to a better focus. What are some things as a younger disciple you did not see? How did this become clearer in time? Consider the Bethsaida account and the Bartimaeus history. How does this help us understand that discipleship is a process of diligently looking and looking again as the Lord patiently works to bring us to wholeness?

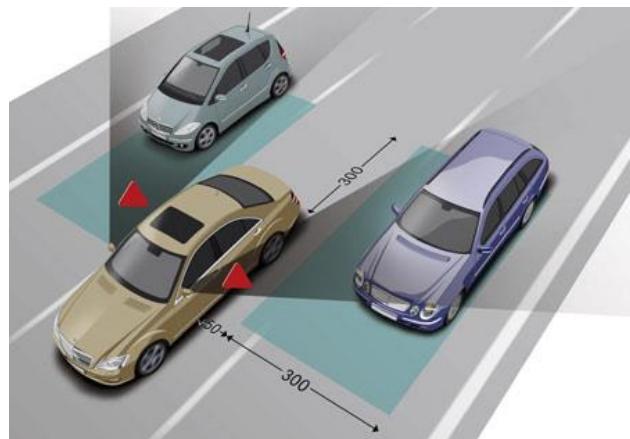
Light Lesson 9

Children of Light: Beware of Your Blind Spots

by David McHenry

When I was learning to drive, my dad was the one teaching me both the rules of the road and what he had learned from experience. One of the experienced-based topics he introduced me to was how to handle the blind spot. As a teenager, I didn't understand what a blind spot was – let alone how dangerous it could be. A blind spot is an area on the vehicle where potential hazards lie but cannot be seen. A vehicle could be in my blind spot without me realizing it. If I changed lanes without checking the blind spot, I could easily cause an accident which could possibly injure someone and cause property damage.

My father explained the importance of preparation and adjustments. Before I even started a trip, I had to adjust both my rearview and side view mirrors properly. He cautioned this step was something I should do every time I drove to minimize the blind spot. But even preparing for a trip, I still had to be cognizant there was still a blind spot between the rearview & side view mirrors. When changing lanes, I had to signal my intentions and look over my shoulder to check the blind spot before changing lanes.



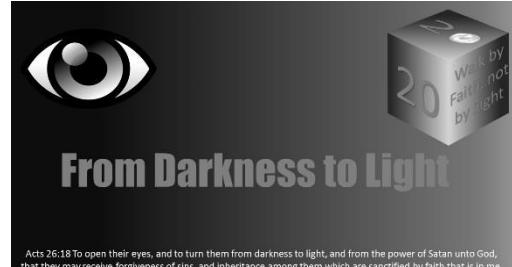
Much to my father's dismay, I was not as careful as I should be on too many occasions. Thankfully he reminded me from the passenger seat “did you check your blind spot?” or “don’t change lanes someone is there!” Even if my father wasn’t with me, there were times the driver of the car in the lane next to me would gently (or not so gently) tap his horn to let me know the lane was not open. If I ignored these warnings and proceeded to change lanes, I would have caused an accident.

Most of us understand the blind spots vehicles have and the danger of ignoring them, but we may not think about a spiritual parallel. There are also spiritual blind spots which we each have. If we do not realize they exist or ignore them and do not respond appropriately, we will end up in spiritual accidents (sin)

in our lives. Spiritual blind spots are much more dangerous than ones in our car. We must be taught where the dangers are and to account for them.

Unknown Danger

When it comes to spiritual matters, ignorance is not bliss. Satan will use our lack of knowledge and awareness as a tool to lead us to sin. Peter describes the devil as a “roaring lion seeking who he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Satan will take advantage of our spiritual blind spots. Solomon warns, “He shall die for his lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray” (Prov 5:23). Having the attitude that study is not important is analogous to the student driver ignoring the existence of blind spots and being surprised when he ends up in an accident. Therefore, we need to give priority to the study of God’s word. One concept which Paul conveyed to Timothy was the word of God is to be used for “instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:15). Solomon advised, “The prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov 22:3). We must equip ourselves by “...rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15), so we can recognize the dangers around us.



Making Necessary Changes

In driving, we must adjust our rear and side view mirrors and look over our shoulder to account for the blind spot. In a similar manner with our spiritual lives, we use the word of God to adjust our thoughts, words, and actions to avoid sin. Paul implores the Roman brethren to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). It is through God’s word we change from worldly thoughts to thinking about things from a godly perspective. Paul told the Ephesians “you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God...” (Eph 4:17, 18). He later says they had not yet learned Christ. Otherwise, they would have “put off ... the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (v. 20-23). We must retrain our minds with God’s word so that we can recognize the dangers near us.

Our speech should also be changed by the influence of the word of God. Christ teaches that the words which come out of our mouth are an indication of what is in our heart (mind). “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceeds evil

thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are things which defile a man..." (Matt 15:18-20). Our speech should reflect both our love for God and our fellow man. Our words can reflect our love for God by praising Him (Eph 1:6), giving thanks to Him (1 Thes 5:18), and giving Him the glory for the wonderful things He has done (Psa 107:31, 40:5, Isa 25:1). James in Chapter 3 teaches we should not be using our mouth for blessing and cursing. He uses a metaphor of a spring having both sweet (drinkable) and bitter (undrinkable) water flowing from it. This should not happen. Neither should we be using our same mouth to bless God and curse men (v. 9-11). Therefore, the words we use should also reflect our love for our fellow man. We can do this by sharing the gospel of Christ (1 Pet 3:15), encouraging one another (1 Thes 5:11), and being gracious with our speech (Col 4:6). All of us have said things which have created bad situations, and we later regretted saying. Before we speak, we should adjust our words to reflect our love for God and our fellow man.



God's word should be causing us to change our actions as well. We are not to be like the man which James describes as looking at his image in a mirror but then forgetting what type of person he was. This is what a person who hears the word of God but does not do it is like. We should be what James later describes "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed by what he does" (James 1:22-25). God used men inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal to us how we should live (2 Pet 1:20, 21). How can we say love God and not do what he asked us to do? (1 John 5:3). We cannot!



Heeding Warnings

The third parallel with the driving analogy is the value of the person who warns you of impending danger when you are ignoring your blind spot. The person in the passenger seat or even a driver in another car beeping his horn is trying to prevent an accident. Both could remain silent and take the attitude “it’s not my place” to tell us and watch the accident happen. Or, they may be more concerned about hurting our feelings than preventing an accident. After the car accident, there is no doubt the driver would rather have been warned than to end up with a wrecked car and injured passengers.



Unfortunately, most of us don't like to be told we are doing something wrong or what we are doing could lead to sin. The Hebrew writer says in Chapter 12, “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him, for whom the Lord loves He chastens...” (v.6). Warning or correcting someone is an act of love. It is a demonstration of concern for the welfare of the person involved. The Hebrew writer goes on to say, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (v. 11). It probably will not feel very good at the moment, but we should be thankful when someone loves us enough to warn or correct us. Solomon is very direct on this topic “Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid” (Prov 12:1). It may sting initially when someone warns us or corrects us, but we should be grateful when someone loves us enough to help us stay away from sin.

To avoid the hazards of our spiritual blind spots, it will require diligence on our part. We must be humble enough to recognize we do not know everything as it relates to God's will for us. Study is required on our part to know where the dangers of sin lie. Continuing in the ways we always have will lead us to sin. A transformation is required in how we think, in what we say, and how we live our lives. And finally, a willingness to heed the warnings of those who love us and are spiritually minded will help us escape dangerous situations.

Light Lesson 9 Questions

Children of Light: Beware of Your Blind Spots

1. What is a blind spot? What is a spiritual blind spot?

2. What makes blind spots so dangerous?

3. We often hear the phrase “ignorance is bliss.” Provide scripture which would support or refute this thought.

4. What can we do to identify our spiritual blind spots?

5. How do we deceive ourselves into thinking we don’t have any spiritual blind spots? How do we respond when others point them out or warn us when we are getting close to sin?

6. Look up scriptures which contrast pride & humility. How do each influence our blind spots?

7. Identify at least one area in your life where you have not effectively managed a spiritual blind spot. Create a plan for how you will better avoid sin and sinful situations.

Light Lesson 10

Children of Light:

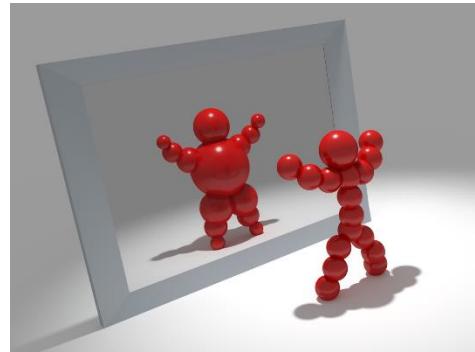
How Wise Are You in Your Eyes?

by Anthony Venuso

Introduction

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge⁸; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7⁹

Visual perception: How do you see your wisdom in comparison to God's wisdom? Are you blinded by your own experiences, accomplishments, and knowledge when it comes to deciding on an appropriate response in a scenario requiring an application of Godly wisdom?



Escape Rooms are becoming more and more popular in our culture. If you're unfamiliar with what an Escape Room is, it is simply a problem-solving board game played out in real life. People are paying companies to lock themselves in a room to see if they can get out by solving various brainteasers. This is how much we enjoy problem solving; we are willing to be locked in a room by strangers to prove our intelligence. This is how much we like to show our wisdom to others. This is how much we enjoy the satisfaction of providing the solution.

Problem solving is something most people enjoy engaging. Whether it is scientific, mathematical, mechanical, simple, difficult, emotional, familial, we enjoy giving our input. Why? Whether we are drawing from our personal

⁸ "Knowledge" is used in Proverbs 1:7. Interestingly Proverbs 9:8-11 is a comparable passage, yet it uses "wisdom" in place of "knowledge." In the biblical text its important to note that "wisdom" is a moral issue rather than an intellectual issue. Adam and Eve partook of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. As a result, they became more aware of their brokenness before God. They were simply more aware of their moral condition. They were aware of their disobedience. Consequences for the first sin resulted in ruined relationships. Relationships that would become more difficult to maintain: God-human, husband-wife, mankind-creation, mankind-evil, and mankind-death.

⁹ Old Testament and New Testament scriptures are referenced from the English Standard Version of the bible unless otherwise noted.

experience, research, or academics, we believe we have a helpful (and more commonly the best) solution. We enjoy problem solving because there's a sense of accomplishment when our solution is correct or helpful. There is a sense of pride in being able to explain we encountered an issue, but through careful reasoning, we were able to solve the problem. We like to be seen as wise! Now, do not misunderstand, providing guidance and solutions is not inherently wrong; in fact it is even encouraged when our intent is pure.¹⁰ If we are blinded by our own pride, we will be destroyed by what we perceive as being wise. As we continue, we will conclude we need to - **Be wise by fearing the Lord because our wisdom falters before God's wisdom.**

First Proof: Fear¹¹ the Lord

Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 provide an appropriate perspective toward progressing in wisdom. Gaining wisdom does not begin with opening countless books. It does not start with memorizing biblical facts and reciting a defense on creation to an atheist or being able to refute countless doctrinal errors. Our ability to see God's wisdom more clearly before our own comes when we understand our position before Him – no one else. Our pride is a major factor in visual perception. How we perceive ourselves and our knowledge will either cloud our visual perspective of God's wisdom or allow us to submit, resulting in true biblical transformation (Rom 12:1-2).

Wisdom and knowledge are connected in the sense that a wise person learns how to apply knowledge in an appropriate manner. The scriptures state, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning knowledge...” Knowledge leads to wisdom; wisdom leads to moral behavior and righteous decision making before the Lord. As Kenneth Boa mentions in his article on Wisdom,

¹⁰ Proverbs 19:20, James 3:17

¹¹ There are two types of “fear” that can be identified from Old Testament studies. The first meaning conveys the idea of having awe and reverence for the Lord God produced by witnessing His sovereignty and character. Fear led the Hebrew midwives to boldly contradict Pharaoh’s commands (Exod 1:17). The second is a fear that produces terror, panic, and dread of the reality and anticipation of judgment produced from witnessing His power. After the commandments are communicated on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20 the Lord demonstrates His power through trumpets sounds, thunder and lightening. Moses’ exhortation after calming the crowds of their fear is, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin.”

“Wisdom has less to do with knowledge than it has to do with the application of knowledge in very specific ways. Wisdom is a skill in the art of living life with each component under the dominion of God. When a person in the Old Testament demonstrated exceptional ability in a craft or art, that person was said to have what the Hebrew language calls *hokma*. English-speaking translators render it as “skill.” In Exodus 31:3-5, God filled a man named Bezalel with the Holy Spirit and with “skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.” The word translated “skill” here is this word *hokma*.

Bezalel was given the ability to take raw materials and shape them into something beautiful and ornate. Likewise, in the book of Proverbs, we are viewed as that raw material. We are valuable but unshaped, worthwhile but undisciplined. We are precious but given to waywardness. We do not have within us the ability to take the raw material of our lives and shape it into the lifestyle our Creator desires us to live. Solomon selected that Hebrew word *hokma* to describe the quality needed by anyone who wanted to live life in the superlative – a life of excellence.”¹²

The challenge before us all is to allow wisdom to move us toward moral transformation rather than self-reliance and pride. Wisdom should move us toward a more solid relationship with God rather than drawing us away into our own deception. Fear leads to wisdom - wisdom leads to a positive reaction to the voice of the Lord.

We have all encountered the individual who always has an answer, most commonly when we look in the mirror. A “know it all” drives us nuts. Why? Two reasons: either because we think we actually know the right answer or because we know someone cannot actually know it all. If they did know it all, then we should go to them for all of our problems. This is a dilemma because then we would have to trust this individual actually does know it all in order to actually follow through with their answers and guidance. How can we trust someone so much that we

¹² Boa, Kenneth. *Wisdom*. Bible.Org

communicate everything to them? So, now it is not only about whether or not someone knows everything. It is about trusting whether they actually know everything and what they will do with the information relayed to them. Who can do that?

Thus, the application is fear the Lord. Proverbs 1:7 supports that if we do not fear the Lord, we are fools. Being wise men and women will be determined by whether or not we are seeking and fearing the Lord. Learning to “fear the Lord,” as Proverbs instructs, is only the beginning. We not only need to see that the Lord needs reverence, but as a clear connection, our fear for the Lord is derived from knowing where wisdom begins. *Be wise! Fear the Lord!*

Second proof: We are fools.

“And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord.”¹³ This is a familiar phrase from the book of Judges. Now, while this phrase may appear innocent and sincere, there’s a preceding phrase which initiates the downward spiral pattern of Judges. Seven times the author of Judges points out the problem throughout the book (Jud 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). These passages explain the first step in the cycle of Israel’s behavior in Judges.

*And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.*¹⁴

The Israelites cried out for deliverance only after they realized their spiritual blindness. *God sees what we are doing. God knows the choices we are making. Do not fool yourself!*

There’s a key word in the in Judges 3:7, “forgot.” What did they forget? They forgot where they came from. They forgot how God interacted with them. They forgot about the Exodus from Egypt. They forgot about the crossing of the Red Sea. They forgot about the care they were given in the wilderness. They forgot about the Lord! The moment we forget about the Lord, our visual perception becomes limited. All we see and care about is ourselves. When we forget the

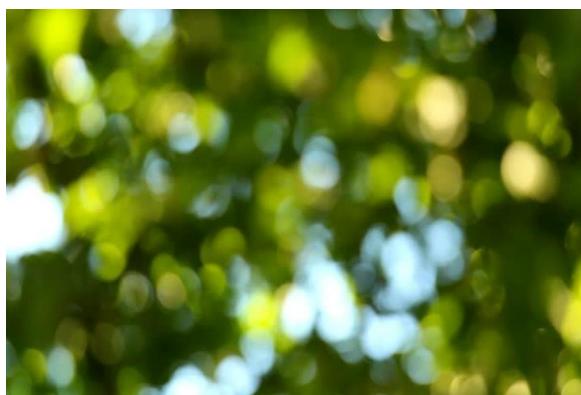
¹³ Judges 6:6

¹⁴ Judges 3:7

efforts put forth from the Lord, we convince ourselves that our deliverance came through our achievements. How does forgetting the Lord impact your leadership in raising your families? How does forgetting the Lord impact your influence on the people around you? How does forgetting the Lord impact your role as man, woman, husband, wife, child, parent, and Christian?

There is a downward spiral pattern in Judges that consists of the Israelite's pride in their own knowledge and wisdom to the point they create situations of despair. Instead of seeking the wisdom of God, they do what is pleasurable in their own eyes and in the end call out for deliverance. Whether you want to admit it or not, we are all sinful. Despite our past or current state, we have rebelled against the Lord because we sought what our eyes desired. The Israelites were promised a peaceful dwelling place so long as they had faith in the Lord who was warring before them as they entered into the promised land. They lost sight of this promise. They forgot about their relationship with God, who had consistently proven to be a provider and deliverer. God has not changed. He is still our provider and deliverer.

How is your vision? I am sure we are all familiar with the story of an individual who went multiple years, maybe into teen years or early adulthood,



without wearing prescribed glasses despite their need for them. What is the reaction when a semi-blind individual who thinks they see just fine has their eyes opened to the reality they have been missing out on? The partially-blind misses the details of the leaves of the tree instead of thinking they're just green blobs on the end of brown straight blurs. The partially-blind misses the ability to walk confidently

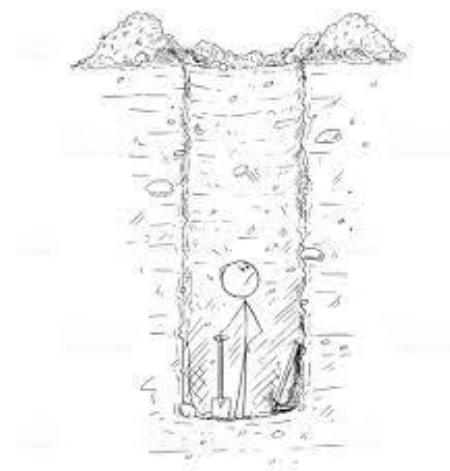
through the woods because of their fear of stumbling.

Take a look at the pattern you have created in your life. Do the results of your actions prove you are seeing clearly? How much has the culture around you influenced your decision making in raising a family, spending your money, involvement in activities, people and places you hang out? In all this be wise! Fear the Lord!

Third Proof: God sees you for what you are.

Romans 1:18-3:20 establishes the sinfulness of Jews and Gentiles.¹⁵ All have sinned. Whether you were raised with the Law or you were raised worshipping the pagan gods. The same rings true for us today. Whether we were raised in a spiritually focused home or we raised on witchcraft, humanism, or atheism, we are all sinners just the same. Romans 3:9-20 clearly establishes how God sees us. We are sinners. To deny our sinfulness is to deny the truth of the Word. How is it that we could become so arrogant as to see our wisdom as more superior to HIS?

This lesson started with the question of how we compare our wisdom to God's. The real question we need to be asking is not the comparison question, nor is it even how "do we see God?" The real scenario we need to evaluate is "how does God see us?" What is His perspective of us? Understanding God's visual perception of mankind will provide a more accurate visual perception from us. The reality of the situation is we are prone to doing evil. The draw to sin is the pitfall of all of mankind. God knows this to be true, which would explain His patience. Time and time again, God out stretches His arm to a rebellious people.



What is your beginning? Whether you want to admit it or not, we are all fools. From the beginning of our lives, what we see we want; we are selfish. If we do not get what we want, we throw a fit. If our fit does not work, we continue the cycle. Let me ask again, how does God see us? In Ezekiel 16, there is an excellent description of the effort God put into our relationship. From the beginning, when we were helpless (wallowing in our blood from birth) to the multiple times that we

¹⁵ Talbert, Charles H. "Paul on the Covenant." *Review & Expositor* 84, no. 2 (March 1, 1987), 303.

walk away from the relationship, HE WORKS in rebuilding the bond. The Lord God sees our helplessness and says, “LIVE!”¹⁶

In Romans 3:9-20, Paul applies a method Rabbis would commonly use in their writing and argumentation. Osborne identifies this method as “pearl-stringing.”¹⁷ Paul’s knowledge of the OT is vast. His citation in vs. 10-18 is proof of his Jewish up bringing. Romans 3:10-18 contains Paul’s “lengthiest citation of Scripture in all of his letters.”¹⁸ Interestingly, Otto Michael presents an argument showing how vs.10-18 is derived from a circulating Psalm in the early church (something to consider).¹⁹

While Paul’s primary emphasis in quoting these old testament passages is placed on the universal sin, it is important to note the logical structure within the catena (a connected series or chain of passages). Osborne establishes an outline for Paul’s use of OT scripture, “the thesis of universal sin stated in verses 10-12 is followed by specific acts of sins – sins of speech (vv. 13-14) and of murder and its results (vv. 15-17) – and finally by the religious aspect of sin: no fear of God (v. 18, note the inclusion with the end of v. 11).”²⁰ The fear of the Lord is the issue. Without the fear of the Lord, we focus on our own wisdom, morality, and righteousness to sail us through this life. As Christians, the fear of the Lord produces wisdom leading to righteousness through the blood of Jesus. How does God see us? We are children needing deliverance from our slavery of sin. Do not be blinded by your pride and self-righteousness to miss this point.



¹⁶ Ezekiel 16:6. I recommend reading this entire chapter for a fresh perspective of how God sees us. God has reached out to us in our darkest hour since sin entered the world.

¹⁷ Grant R. Osborne, “Romans,” The IVP NT Commentary, Vol 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 86.

¹⁸ Mark Seifrid, “Romans,” Commentary on the New Testament Use of The Old Testament. Ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 616.

¹⁹ Robert Jewett, “Romans,” Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 259.

²⁰ Osborne, 87.

How often have we heard the phrase, “I have some good news, and I have some bad news.” Whenever someone presents this statement, it leaves us in suspense. Which one do you usually choose to hear first, the bad or the good? Generally, I think we start with the bad, so we can end on a positive note after hearing the bad news. In Romans, Paul has made it clear he has some bad news for the entire world, Jew and Gentile, you and me. The bad news: All have sinned. No matter what our background is, no matter what our families taught us, no matter how many “good things” we do, we are all sinners. The good news is we can be freed from this sin if we open our eyes to the grace that is before us. Countless times God has revealed himself clearly. Do not be blinded by your own sin, worldview, and perspective to miss out on His glory.

Know your place before your gracious King, and your eyes will be opened to His wisdom. The sooner we accept we cannot save ourselves, the sooner our wisdom will decrease, and our eyes will be opened to His wisdom. Be Wise! Fear the Lord!

Conclusion

Our wisdom falters before God’s wisdom. Be Wise! Fear the Lord! Until we comprehend our sinfulness, we will have a challenge of understanding God’s perception of us. He knows what we are. He knows from where we came. He knows our deepest inward darkness. He knows our deepest outward darkness. Despite what He knows about our helpless depraved state, He still reaches out to us because we are still valued in His perspective. Have fear (reverence) for a God who knows what we are but still chooses to reach out to us.



Light Lesson 10 Questions

Children of Light: How Wise Are You in Your Eyes?

Passages to read for class: Proverbs 1:7, Judges (skim the entire book for the downward spiral of sin), and Romans 3:1-31.

1. Visual perception: What are the consequences in your life of failing to see beyond your pride in order to more clearly see God's wisdom?

2. How are relationships impacted when we are blinded by our own wisdom?

3. Is biblical wisdom an intellectual issue, a moral issue, or both?

Explain:

4. Who do you seek for wisdom?

5. What can you do to improve your visual perception by trusting in God's wisdom?

Light Lesson 11

Seen and Unseen:

Holiness: The Light of Heaven and God's Glory

by Randy Yerby and T.S. Stephens

Introduction

“And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa 6:3).

“The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4:8)

God is the creator. God is eternal. God is immutable and unchanging. God is trustworthy. God is above human ways. God is just. God is omnipotent and omniscient. However, the first four characteristics many name to describe God are love, righteous, light, and holy. Holy is His permeating and transcendent quality. It encompasses everything. Holiness encompasses God’s divine nature, including his various attributes such as love, righteousness, and light. Psalm 43:3 expresses it this way: “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.”



Defining Holy

Holy has two ideas when defining it. The first is set apart from sin. Our Holy God is completely separated from sin! This idea is on the word *hagios*. God and all that He does are the total opposite of Satan and all that he does. (James 1:17; Titus 1:2; 1 John 1:5; Hab 1:12-13; Isa 6:1-7). The second definition of “holy” refers to “a unique character that causes the reaction of reverence/honor” (Moses at the burning bush; Exod 3:1-6). God is honored in everything He does. (Sin destroyed [John 1:29]; Purchasing the church [Acts 20:28]; 1 Pet 2:9).

God is Holy

God is holy. His heavenly dwelling is “holy” (Deut 26:15). His throne is “holy” (Psa 47:8). His name Is “holy” (Matt 6:9). His Power is “holy” (Isa 52:10). All His ways are “holy.” This is best seen in the crescendo of Revelation 4:1-11. For God to be holy is for Him to be holy in relation to every aspect of His nature and character. When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another

problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of God being holy to a long list of attributes, as one attribute among many. However, when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute, but His nature. God is called holy in an absolute sense. The word is used as a synonym for His deity. “That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us His love is holy love, his justice is holy justice, his mercy is holy mercy, his knowledge is holy knowledge, his spirit is holy spirit.”

The Effect of God’s Holiness

What should be our typical immediate reaction to God’s holiness is illustrated by John and Isaiah. John reacts in Revelation 1:17, “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.” The prophet Isaiah reacts similarly as recorded in Isaiah 6:5, “Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips.” The responses are fear and awe yielding humility because of God’s holiness. Is this our response? Do we grasp that God is holy, holy, holy? What should be our response to God’s holiness?

Fear (reverence) drives us to humility. Are we humbled when we come before Him? What is our disposition to Him when we come before Him in worship, in prayer, in service? All of these activities should involve complete humility, awe, reverence, and love. It should truly be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

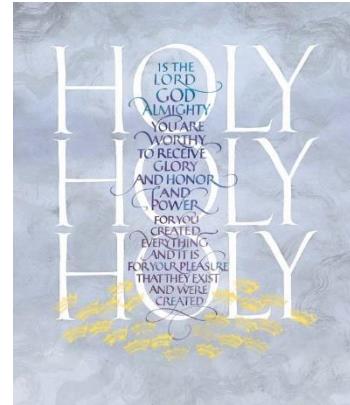
2 Samuel 6:1-11 also helps one understand how we should respond to God’s holiness. The holiness of God should guide and govern our thinking as well as our actions. Uzzah’s intention may have been noble, but the action violated God’s command and attempted to breach His holiness. The holiness of God needs to be considered when we speak of accountability. Too often we are willing to accept our good intentions as being good enough. The appropriate response to the holiness of God is fear (reverence), and the outworking of our fear is obedience. The holiness of God is the basis and the compelling necessity for our sanctification. James 4:8-10 admonishes us to draw near to God in humility, purifying our hearts.

The Second Emphasis of Holy

The second emphasis of the term holy is absolute moral perfection. This is tied to our understanding of God as light. 1 John 1:5 teaches, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." To help us understand that God is light, think about how He has no shadow (James 1:17). A light source will not create a shadow itself. A match struck with a light behind it will have a shadow, but the flame will not. This state of moral perfection is impossible for us to achieve apart from God's redemptive plan. Without the purifying blood of Jesus, none of us would be able to approach God because of His holiness (Heb 9:13-14).



Isaiah 6:1-5 reads, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." As we have already seen, this is a very real reaction to God's holiness. Too many claiming to see God have no sense of His holiness, and so their comments are clearly false.

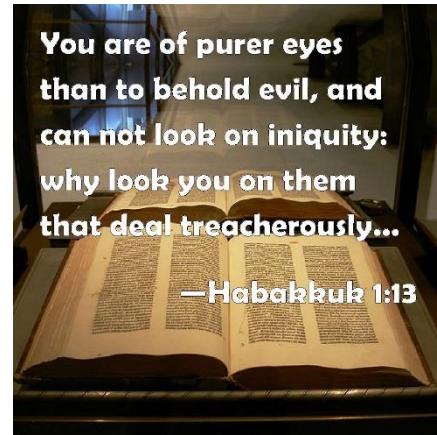


R.C. Sproul commented on Isaiah 6 and holiness by saying: "The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy. Not that He is merely holy, or even holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy. The Bible never says that God is love, love, love, or mercy, mercy, mercy, or wrath, wrath, wrath, or justice, justice, justice. It does say that He is holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is full of His glory."

God's Wrath and Sin

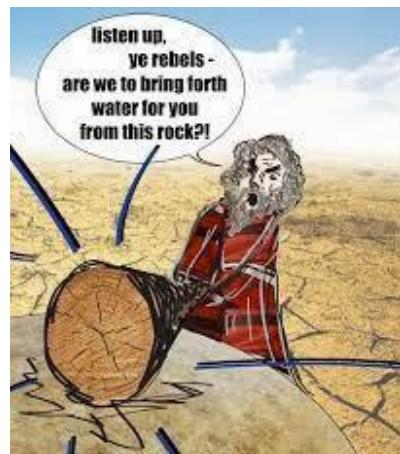
Darkness (evil) is banished by the light of God. The contrast is seen in the scriptures by God's settled opposition to sin. He demonstrates His divine revulsion to evil. The only possible response from a Holy, Holy, Holy God!

Habakkuk 1:12-13 reads "Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?*"

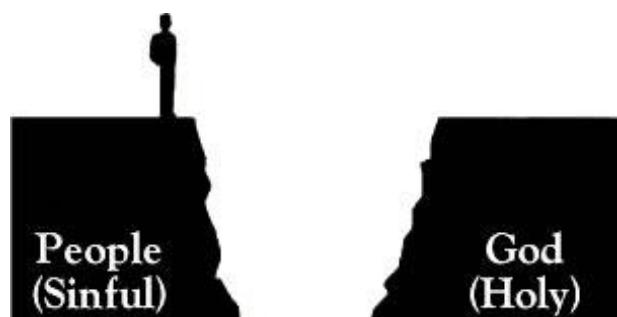


Moses did not make it to the promise land because he did not demonstrate respect for God's holiness. (God commanded the

Israelites to be holy because He was holy in Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26). Numbers 20:12 reads, "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to **sanctify me in the eyes** of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." Moses, the great leader of God's people, failed to reach the promise land because he tried to put his arm around God and say must "we" do this for you. Pride is dangerous, so God's holiness should help us live in humility.



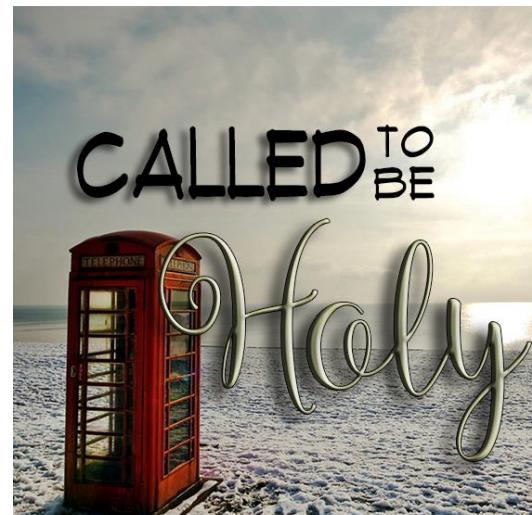
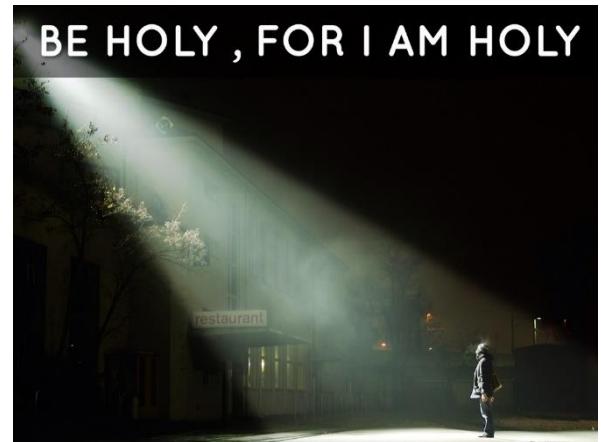
What is sin's effect? First, sin separates from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 teaches, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear." Second, sin yields God's wrath. Romans 1:18 reads, "For the wrath of God is



revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

Because sin separates us from God and brings God's wrath, Paul explains God's plan to save us in Romans 3:23-25. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Thus, despite the effects of sin, we are still called to be **holy!**

God's Calls for the Church to Be Holy The message is clear. God has called Christians into holiness. We are to be like Him. This causes us to ask: How can we be holy as He is holy? The idea of being holy is clearly directive and commanded, not some mere suggestion. 1 Peter 2:9-10 teaches, "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." Ephesians 1:4-7 reads, "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: 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. In whom we have **redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins**, according to the riches of his grace."

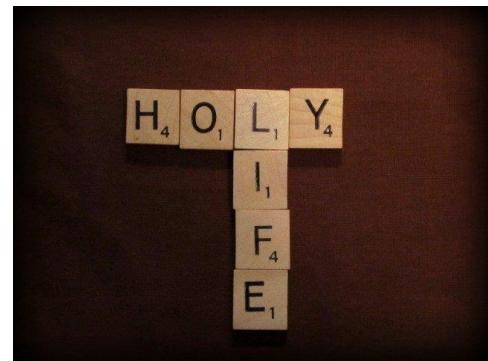


This is where our study of darkness and light fits in a discussion of holiness. Christians have been called out of darkness to walk as children of light, carrying

the light and being holy. (See also 1 John 1:7-10.) 1 Peter 1:13-16 communicates, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy.**” 2 Peter 1:3-4 further notes that children of the Light become partakers of the divine nature. “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**: Whereby are given unto us **exceeding great and precious promises**: that by these ye might be **partakers of the divine nature**, having **escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**”

The Hebrews writer in 10:19-22 teaches, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath **consecrated** for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And *having* an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” The point is Christians are made holy in Jesus Christ! Children of Light are called to a life of holiness, out of darkness. 2 Corinthians 7:1 reads, “Having therefore these **promises**, dearly beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves** from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness** in the fear of God.” The ESV translates the text, “Since we have these **promises**, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves** from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing **holiness to completion** in the fear of God.”

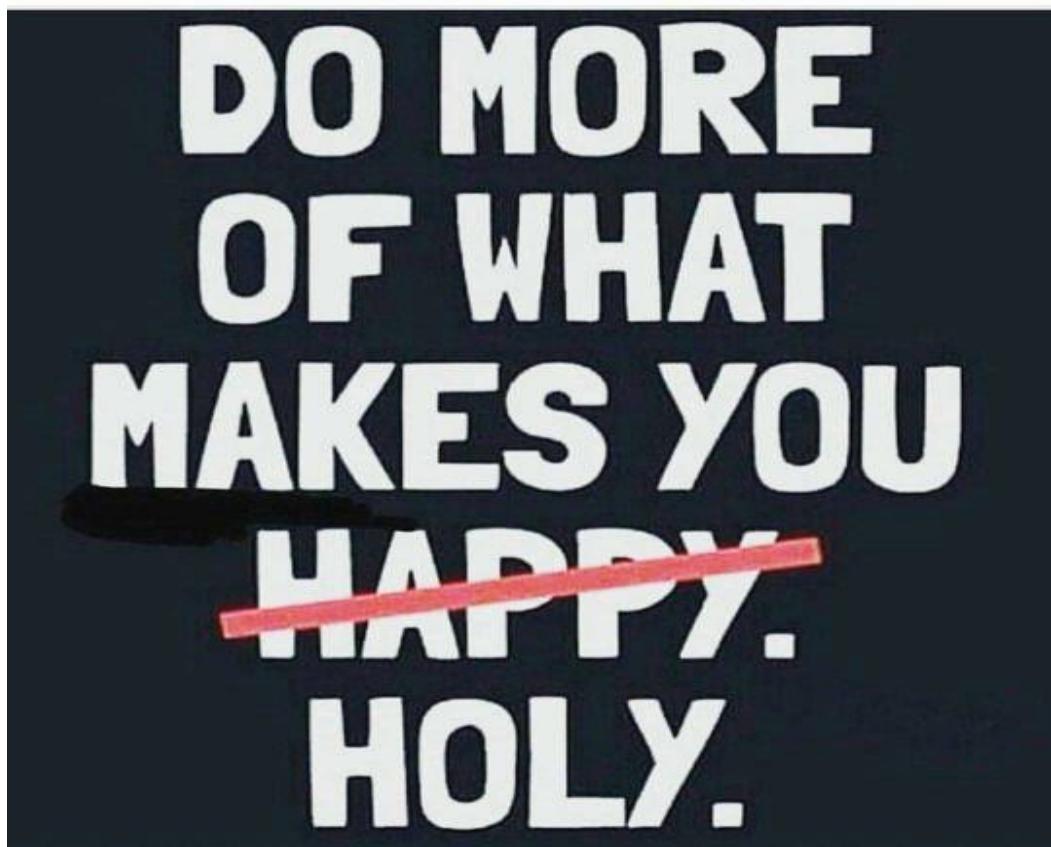
Clearly, because of God’s revulsion to sin (holiness), Christians must be sanctified. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 explains, “For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter: because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. **For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.** He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.”



Holiness makes a difference in how we live our daily lives. God sees our sins. Sin separates us from God. God expects us to practice self-control and put away sin and uncleanness. God expects us to transform to offer a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable through Christ with our lives (Rom 12:1-2). God calls us to be holy as He is holy. Living holy as Christ did begins with opening our thinking to truth and continues with an ongoing renewal process from God's word. Christians are renewed in study, meditation, prayer, and penitence. To be partakers of God's holiness, Christians must start with humility. (See also Rom 12:3; Eph 4:1-3; Phil 2:3-4; Col 3:12-13; 1 Pet 5:5; and Acts 20:18-19.)

Conclusion

God is holy, holy, holy! God is unique, separate, sacred, and physically unapproachable. His holiness should humble us, cause us to have reverence and awe in our worship and prayer, and impact our daily walk in His light. Further, God is absolute moral perfection. God is opposed to sin because He is holy. Sin separates us from God, bringing His wrath. However, we are called to be holy as partakers of the divine nature, to put away former lusts, to carry the true light of Christ to the lost as we walk in the light.



Light Lesson 11 Questions

Seen and Unseen:

Holiness: The Light of Heaven and God's Glory

1. Which of the following of God are holy? (a)throne (b)name (c)power (d)His ways
2. What attribute is the transcendent quality of God?
3. What was the reaction of John in Revelation and Isaiah to God's holiness?
4. What was the problem with Uzzah's (possibly noble intended) action in 2 Samuel 6?
5. What does Hebrews 9:13-14 teach us?
6. What does light do the darkness?
7. What kept Moses from going into the promised land?
8. To what does God call the church to be? Is this a suggestion or a command?
9. How do we live holy? How do we perfect holiness?

Light Lesson 12

Seen and Unseen:

Light and Holiness

by Randy Yerby and T. S. Stephens

Introduction

God is light. Darkness is evil. Jesus is the true light. Christians are to walk as children of light. Holiness is God's permeating quality that encompasses attributes such as light. In calling on His children to have the relationship of light with Him, God also calls us to be holy.

R.C. Sproul commented on God's holiness by saying: "The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy. Not that He is merely holy, or even holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy. The Bible never says that God is love, love, love, or mercy, mercy, mercy, or wrath, wrath, wrath, or justice, justice, justice. It does say that He is holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is full of His glory."

The picture of a person is really an image and not the true person. God's image, or our understanding of Him, is tied to love, light, righteousness, and holiness. Ephesians 4:23-24, Colossians 3:10, and 2 Peter 1:3-4 teach Christians to be transformed and renewed into the image of the Lord. (See also Rom 12:1-2.) Just as we see a parent in a child, as God's children, we are reprints of His image. Thus, when a person looks at a Christian, they should see God's image reflected in their walk.

God Is Light and Love

As God's image bearers, Christians are to be lights in this world. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Light is a common metaphor in the Bible for righteousness and goodness. Righteousness is symbolized as the morning sun in Proverbs 4:18. Light is associated with God and His word in Psalms 119:105 and Proverbs 6:23. In Psalms 27:1, God is light and salvation. Good works are pictured as light in Matthew 5:16 and Psalms 76:4. God dwells in unapproachable light as 1 Timothy 6:16 uses to describe His glory and holiness. God is the Father of Lights without shadow or turning in James 1:17. He is the Light of heaven (Rev 21:23).

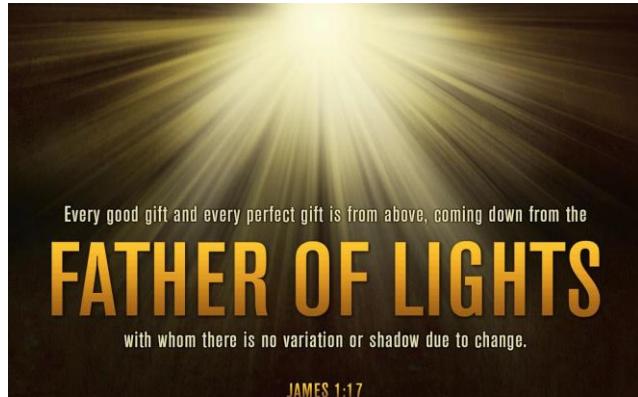


In addition to God being light, God is love (1 John 4:8). Those who use His promises to escape the corruption in the world become partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4). God's nature is light, love, and holy yielding for us joy and hope. There is no threat of darkness with despair or misery in His light and love. No small print in the understanding or hidden shadow is in God's light.

Darkness Is Evil

On the other hand, darkness is the metaphor that signifies sin and evil, including distress, trouble, and sorrow. 1 John 1:6 teaches, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” By contrast, “...God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all ...because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 1:5; 2:8-11).

In addition, darkness represents the wicked in Proverbs 2:13, judgment in Exodus 10:21, and death in Psalms 88:12. Jesus calls Hell “outer darkness” (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). While walking in darkness, we are spiritually blinded, and reach for a comforting object or pleasure. In this state of blindness, we become enslaved to the sin and temptations Satan is using. A few years back, I was walking in the dark to my car from a football game, and I did not realize the sidewalk had risen significantly above the street level as I walked up a hill. When I went to cross the dark street, I fell about three feet. I hit my knee among other body parts. The cars that passed before I got out of the street at first drove around me until someone finally stopped to help me. Darkness causes us to make mistakes we would not make if we could see. Darkness is Satan’s tool.



Jesus Is the True Light

Jesus is the radiance and the express image of the Father, and He is the light of the world. If the Old Law was a shadow, then Jesus is the true image of God expressed. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; **Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high**12 (Heb 1:1-3).

In John 8:12, Jesus states, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” We understand Christians are meant to walk and grow in holiness and mature in the faith by following the Messiah. 2 Peter 3:18 teaches, “But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” His light covers all darkness, comforts Christians, and is a guiding lamp , especially in times of trouble or trial. He challenges us to believe in that light.

Jesus says, “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”** (John 12:35-36).²¹



²¹ See also John’s identification in John 1:6-9. See also Isaiah’s foretelling of Jesus as the light in Isaiah 42:6,7,16 and 60:1-3, 19-20.

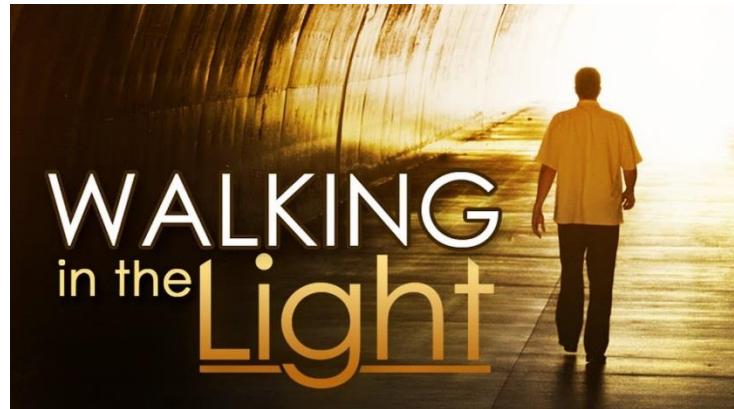
Children of Light

We are taught as children of God to walk in the light in 1 John 1:5-10. The cornerstone is that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness. The application in verses 6-7 is about our relationship with Him based on us walking in the light, not in darkness. Jesus describes His disciples as light bearers in Matthew 5:14-16. Christians' lives are a shining light and witness to the world. "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8).

As His children, we should put on the armor of light. "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). "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thes 5:5). Thus, to walk in the light means to know God and to live righteously and holy. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:14-16).

For my finite mind, I use the brightest light I know to think of God's radiance, the Sun. I use the light beam that travels to earth to understand Christ as the express radiance. As His image bearer, I am the reflector or mirror to carry that light to the lost.

Christians cannot continue in the darkness of sin. Sin is separation from God. Christ's light banishes the darkness from our lives. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isa 9:2). Some folks like the darkness and are uncomfortable in the light. "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" (John 3:19-21).

As the true light, Jesus came that His followers might be adopted sons of God. We must reflect His light into a world darkened by sin. As His image bearers, we seek "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

Light and Holiness

God is light. Darkness is evil. Jesus is the true light. Christians are to walk as children of light. Holiness is God's permeating quality that encompasses attributes such as light. In calling on His children to have the relationship in light with Him, God also calls us to be holy. What does it mean to partake or perfect holiness as a Christian?



Light Lesson 12 Questions

Seen and Unseen: Light and Holiness

1. What is meant by “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” in 1 John 1:5?
2. What metaphor describes sin and evil in 1 John 1?
3. Who is the true light? Does this imply there are false lights?
4. Was John the true light?
5. What did Isaiah foretell of the Gentiles in 42:6-7?
6. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 teach children of light?
7. What does John 3:19-21 teach?
8. What was Paul’s purpose according to Acts 26:18?

Light Lesson 13

Seen and Unseen: White Fields and the Walking Dead

Helping Ordinary People Evangelize (HOPE)

by Caleb Churchill

Introduction

In Luke 9:59, Luke tells us that Jesus said to a man, “Follow Me.” The man responded, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” Jesus replied, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” A couple of things are striking about this encounter. First, Jesus considers many who are alive to be “dead.” How else can “the dead” bury “the dead?” Second, the call for this man (and all who choose to follow Jesus) is to “go” and “proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” And Jesus prioritizes that call even over this man’s desire to go and bury his father! How urgent is this mission!

When we hear of “The Walking Dead,” we may be more likely to readily connect with a group of zombies staggering around on a popular TV show than we do with the people of this world. But the scriptures teach us that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Therefore, Paul says, “we regard no one according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16). We ought to realize the walking dead are all around us-- our neighbors, our co-workers or fellow students, our friends and family are all going to stand before God one day and give an account for their lives. If you thought about that fact daily, would it not change how you approach every person you encounter? If we really believe that others around us are dead in their sins, then should we not submit to Jesus’ command to “go” and “proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God?”

In another occasion, Jesus told his disciples to “lift up [their] eyes” and “see that the fields are white for harvest” (John 4:35). Similarly, he once said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest that He may send out workers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2). And after telling his disciples to pray for more workers, Jesus sent

them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. It appears (at least) part of the reason Jesus wanted his disciples to pray for more workers was that in praying for more workers they might realize their responsibility to become the workers they were praying for. Do you see the fields around you as white and ready for harvest? If not, you need to pray that God would open your eyes so you may see the people around you as they really are, not as they may appear to be.



The Call to Make Disciples

What is evangelism? The word “evangelize” is used most often in the gospel of Luke and Acts. The first place we see this word used in **Luke** is in **1:19**, where Gabriel was sent to speak and “bring this good news” to Zacharias. The word translated “bring good news” is the word *euangelisasthai* from which we get the word “evangelism.” You may notice a word within the word evangelism. The word *angel* simply means messenger. So, to be an evangelist, strictly speaking, is to be a messenger of good news. It is important to note a messenger is not a creator but a distributor. It is not the role of the evangelist to create a message but to distribute the message in which they have been entrusted.

Who must evangelize? From the beginning of God’s church, it was the role of every disciple to participate in the work of evangelism. Someone might say, “When Jesus spoke the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20), wasn’t he speaking to the apostles?” Yes, that is true. But also consider, that when the persecution first arose in the Jerusalem church, everyone was scattered, except the apostles who stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). And Luke tells us that “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). So, it was not only the apostles who were engaging in the work of evangelism. Every disciple participated in scattering the word. Another may question, “Isn’t evangelism the role of the evangelist?” Yes, it is true evangelists are messengers of the good news. But Paul actually argues that the role of an evangelist is also to “equip the saints

for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). So, the role of the evangelist is not only to do the work of evangelism, but also to train others to do the work of evangelism as well.

Practically, as disciples, our aim is simply to share the good news that we know to be true. And if we know enough to obey the gospel, then we know enough to share the gospel. If you are a disciple of Jesus, can you not tell someone “why you chose to follow Jesus” or “what made Jesus so special that you would give up your life to follow after Him”? Your job is simply to share what you know. And one of the best phrases to learn as a disciple is three short words-- “I don’t know.”

The only reason why you should not get involved in the work of evangelism is if you are not trying to live like a disciple of Jesus. If you are sharing the gospel, but not living it, you will do more harm than good; but if you are trying to live like Jesus, then it is important you begin working as a messenger of good news. You don’t need to be perfect or even mature to start serving in this way. Jesus didn’t wait for his disciples to mature before sending them out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. He knew that sending them out would be part of what would help them grow and mature. As disciples, it is our goal to become like our teacher (Luke 6:40). Since Jesus made it his mission to seek and save the lost, we, too, seek to do the same.

The Challenge of Making Disciples

What are the biggest challenges you face in making disciples? One of the greatest challenges disciples face in evangelism can be summarized by “fears.” We are afraid of many things. First, we fear rejection. We think, “What might happen to me if I talk to them about Jesus?” Or “I don’t want to risk losing my relationship with this person.” Another fear many we struggle with is the fear of failure. We are fearful; we might do more harm than good. We fear we don’t know how to do evangelism properly. “I don’t know what to say.” “I don’t know how to say it.” “I don’t know where to start.” These are some of the most common excuses for not getting involved in evangelism. We fear we may push people further away from the Lord.



Another problem in evangelism is simply forgetting. Often, we are unaware of the opportunities around us or not conscious of the need to speak about God in our day to day life. Sometimes in our minds, we are simply too busy to evangelize. I often hear people say things like, “With so much to do, I’m just not thinking about evangelism during my day.”

One other challenge that can hinder us from evangelism is our own faith. Particularly, when someone lacks conviction in their beliefs, it is hard to find the zeal to go and preach about their beliefs. Sometimes, questions over the veracity and reliability of the scriptures or the accounts of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection may hinder us from sharing the gospel with the world.

How do we overcome these challenges?

We can overcome fears. In dealing with the fear of rejection, we come to grips with the fact that facing rejection is part of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We serve a crucified King who came to earth and was rejected so we could be redeemed. Remembering Jesus’ suffering and reflecting on His deep love for us will motivate us to be willing to suffer rejection for His sake. To overcome the fear of rejection, we must take our eyes off of ourselves and off of what the other person might do to us, and put our eyes on Jesus Christ who suffered rejection to the point of crucifixion so that we, too, might return to the shepherd and guardian of our souls (1 Pet 2:21-25).



The fear of failure may seem more noble or less selfish than the fear of rejection, but it is in reality just as much of a hindrance. In overcoming these fears, it is important to remember that it is God who gives the increase and God who is at work in the hearts of men. You will never push someone further away from God by speaking the truth to them in love. Sometimes we get discouraged because we cannot do what we are not asked to do. We cannot change people; we can only proclaim the gospel. If we know enough to become a disciple, then we know enough to be able to help someone come to know about Jesus and about what it means to be a disciple. And one of the greatest things about being a messenger is that you can say “I don’t know,” if you don’t know an answer.

A few practical suggestions may be helpful here. First, find a mentor who is skilled in evangelism, and follow them and learn from them. Second, learn a book of the bible that you can read with someone and share the things you have learned. Lastly, ask one of your pastors, evangelists, or teachers to teach you how to do evangelism.

We can overcome forgetfulness. One of the most important ways to develop consciousness is through prayer. Learn to pray for opportunities to share the gospel. Praying is one way God opens our eyes to the opportunities around us. Paul's prayer in Colossians 4:2-6 is especially helpful in this. Making a list of people you can pray for can keep you conscious of the need to share the gospel with them.

We can overcome faith struggles. While struggling with your faith, there may be things you know are certainly true. Don't be afraid to share what you know is true even while you may struggle with things you are uncertain about. Talk to those who are stronger in faith, and don't be afraid to ask hard questions. Many faithful servants of God throughout history struggled with doubts at various times in their lives. Be encouraged by seeking to strengthen your faith in the word, prayer, and in fellowship with those who have a stronger faith than you. And remember that with faith, there will always be questions. If there were no questions, it would not be faith. While you must have answers for some questions to be an effective evangelist, you don't have to know all the answers. As long as you are in this world, you will not know all the answers to every question.

We can overcome all challenges. The most important ingredient in effective evangelism is love. Love overcomes fear. The things we love in life, we are courageous to speak about even when we may face rejection for it. If we love something, then even if we do not know how to do it well, we will work hard to learn how to do it. If we love God and love people, we will make it our aim to study Jesus and the scriptures (in part) to become a better evangelist.

Secondly, love also helps us focus on what is really important. The things in life we love the most are on our mind and in our heart. Thirdly, love strengthens our faith. If we love God and the people He has made, we are not going to give up when we have doubts. Our love for God will lead us not only to question what we believe but also to seek answers to the questions we have. So, love is the key to

evangelism. If we love the Lord, we will love His people and keep learning and growing as we seek to obey the Lord by sharing the gospel with the world.

Equipping the Church to Make Disciples

What is necessary for us to do the work of evangelism? Here are some things that are necessary for the work of evangelism to take place:

Initiative: Jesus does not tell his disciples to wait and simply help the people who come to them. Jesus tells them to “Go make disciples” (Matt 28:19-20). Actually, he did tell them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. But since the Holy Spirit has already come, what are we waiting for? We must take the initiative to go and make disciples. So many opportunities pass us by as we wait for people to come to church or wait for people to come to us and ask for help. While our tendency and preference may be to wait for disciples to come to us and knock on our door, the call is not to wait, but to go. We will only be able to see how plentiful the harvest truly is when we decide to obey Jesus and take the initiative to go out and seek the lost.

Invitation: Invitation is a prerequisite for conversion. A person cannot be converted until they are first invited. In fact, that is how it worked with Jesus’ first disciples. Peter became a disciple after he was invited by his brother Andrew (John 1:41). Philip found Nathanael and told him that he had found the One Moses and the prophets wrote about (John 1:45). When Nathanael doubted that anything good could come out of Nazareth, Philip simply said, “Come and see” (John 1:46).

While not everyone may be gifted enough to teach the whole purpose of God, virtually every disciple has the ability to invite people to “come and see.” Inviting people to Bible studies where they can see Jesus or inviting them into your home for a conversation are great ways to get people to see Jesus. Your success as an evangelist is not determined by whether they receive the invitation and actually respond; your success is in doing the asking and inviting.

Instruction: Since a disciple is a student or a learner, a disciple must be taught. People must be taught what makes Jesus so valuable that they should give up everything to follow him. People must be taught how to be saved and how they ought to think, walk, and talk once they are saved. Some act as if the work of God is done after a person is baptized, but that is actually when the work is just beginning. Jesus said, “baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded” (Matt 28:19). So, the process of becoming disciples doesn’t end at baptism; it is a lifelong process. And the process of becoming disciples requires teachers. Some teachers will teach in a formal setting; others will teach and train informally. And this role is not only for men. Paul told Titus it was the role of older women to teach the younger women (Titus 2:3-5). What is most important is disciples are instructed in the way they are to live.



Involvement: The work of evangelism will flourish when every member of the body is doing their part by involving themselves in the work in some way. Not every member will have the same role in evangelism, but every member will have a part to play in the growth of the body of Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor 3:6). But how did Apollos become a disciple? We do not know who the first person was to introduce him to Jesus. But we do know he was taught along the way by Priscilla and Aquila who taught him more accurately the way of Christ (Acts 18:24-28).

Consider also the case of Paul. While Jesus appeared directly to him and showed him compassion, Paul was first impacted by Stephen’s courage and boldness in the face of death. Then, it took the boldness and courage of Ananias to go and teach Paul what he should do to be saved. And even after his conversion, how difficult Paul’s early years would have been had it not been for a man named Joseph (nicknamed “Barnabas”) who risked his neck to encourage Paul and bring him to the brethren when everyone else was avoiding him.

Consider also there is much work to be done in evangelism that may not directly involve teaching. God used a group of women praying down by the river

as catalysts for the gospel to spread across Philippi. How would Paul have afforded to stay and teach without the persistent support and hospitality of Lydia? If you read through the book of Acts carefully with an eye for evangelists, you will notice how many ordinary men and women contributed to the work of sharing the gospel by simply using whatever gifts, abilities, and possessions they were given to share in the work of spreading the gospel.

Take some time to make a list of all the necessary things that are involved in a person becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. After finishing this exercise, every disciple should be able to see ways that they can get involved in the work of spreading the gospel. It is not a healthy church who looks only to the evangelist to do evangelism. For this reason, the role of leaders in the church is to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-12).

Conclusion

God has brought us out of darkness and into the light so we may proclaim His excellencies to the world around us, so more and more people come to glorify Him (1 Pet 2:9-12). For us to fulfill our calling, we must open our eyes to see the white fields and the walking dead around us and open our mouths to share this good news. May God help us to fulfill our calling by diligently sharing the gospel until He comes.



Light Lesson 13 Questions

Seen and Unseen: White Fields and the Walking Dead

Helping Ordinary People Evangelize (HOPE)

1. What is evangelism? Whose job is it to do evangelism?
2. What are the biggest challenges you personally face in making disciples?
3. How do we overcome these challenges?
4. What is necessary for us to do the work of evangelism?
5. How do we move from an academic understanding of the need for evangelism to practical action in evangelism?
6. What do you need from the leaders of the church to help you do the work of evangelism more effectively?
7. What can you personally do to perform the work of evangelism more effectively?

Light Lesson 14

Seen and Unseen:

Powerful but Cannot See It: Love

by Caleb and Emily McHenry

Introduction

On a stormy day, someone can make the statement “look at the wind!” As you look out the window, you will see trees shaking and grass moving, but where is the wind? Love is like the wind. You can feel it and see the effects of it, but when it comes to using our physical eyes to see it, it has no form. Love is powerful, but yet not “seen.”

Even though love is “*the greatest of all*” (1 Cor 13:13), it seems to be missed and neglected so often by the world and sadly, even by us.

We cannot See It, but We Can Know It

We know love itself is not tangible. Can we see it? Can we taste or touch it? So how then will we identify and practice love in our lives? Take a look at these two verses.

Romans 5:6-8 - “*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

and

1 John 3:16 - “***By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.***”

Like all good things, love starts with Jesus. If we are going to look to the Bible for the answers for identifying love in our lives, it will come from looking at Christ and His example. Notice the two phrases in these passages about love, “*God shows his love for us*” and “*by this we know love.*” **Although we cannot see love, we can see Jesus; therefore, we can know love.** God “*demonstrates*” love by the life given by Jesus. And then as John says, this laying down of His life is how we can/do know love.

Just as we can see the love God has for us by what He does, the rest of the world can see what we love by what we do. The next question each of us can ask ourselves is “what does the world *see* me as a lover of?” Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, provides us with some options.

2 Timothy 3:1-4 - *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”*

If lovers of self, money, and pleasure are not those who love God, then we can take the short step to conclude the inverse. Those who are lovers of God do not seek themselves, do not let these things bog down their hearts, and are willing to deny the pleasures of this world for the sake of Jesus. If we continue to the next verse, we can understand another important point.



2 Timothy 3:5 - *“having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”*

Here is an example of how our eyes deceive us. There are lovers of pleasure that “[appear godly]” yet do not love God. But if we use the life of Jesus (and His death) as our template, we can *see* past the external and *look* at the heart of a person.

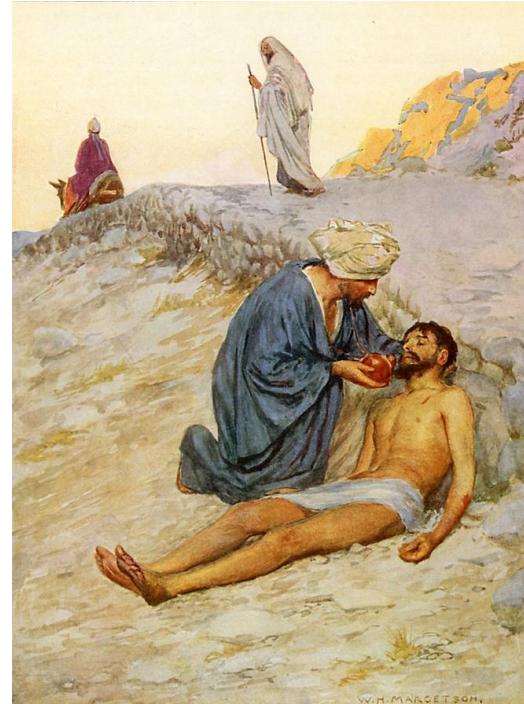
Let’s look at an example. Recall the parable of the good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25-37). Let’s go through the dialog. When the lawyer asks, “*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus responds, “*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*” The lawyer then replies, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself... But [the lawyer], desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’*” After Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan, He asked the question to the lawyer “*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*” Was it the priest or the Levite? They would have certainly by physical characteristics appeared to be godly people. Yet we can see the Samaritan, who by his physical characteristic (nationality) was not considered righteous, was the loving neighbor.

The lawyer also understood this fact. He answered Jesus, “*the one who showed him mercy.*’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’”

The command was to love your neighbor as yourself. The word love was not mentioned in the parable, yet the lawyer (and us) can easily know the one who proved to be a neighbor was “*the one who showed [the man who fell among the robbers] mercy.*” We, as people, can know whether or not someone is showing love. Our love today as Christians can, should, and will be known by the mercy and grace we show to all who are our neighbors. When love is who you are, it cannot help but be seen by those around you.

1 John 4:7-9 - “*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*”

The same love Jesus shows us and fills us with is the love we too can “*manifest*” in our lives in order to help others *see* it. The fact love is strong enough to be observed is in itself a “powerful” characteristic.



What Is Love?

Many people have tried to describe love and to understand it. I think none of us could possibly do it better than the inspired apostles did. They were the ones who saw love manifested in the flesh. Consider some verses written by Paul and John about love.

- **Love Defined** - 1 Corinthians 13
- **Love Exemplified** - Philippians 2:3-8
- **Love Characterized** - 1 John 4:7-21



There is a lot of reading here but considering Love *is* the greatest of all it is well worth the extra time spent. The actions that are/come from love tend to not come naturally to human nature.

Everything is Nothing Without Love

When it comes to powerful things throughout history, we could list the tongue as one of the most powerful. James in James 3 describes the tongue as something so small yet so powerful, comparing it to a small fire which can burn down a whole forest. It has been the catalyst of revolutions, civil wars, and many other conflicts through history. But when it comes to the things of God, the tongue is not much without love.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, lists it among other things saying, “*If I...*”

1. “*Speak in the tongues of men and of angels*”
2. “*Have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,*”
3. “*and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains*”
4. “*Give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned*”

But follows each statement with “*but have not love...*”

1. “*I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*”
2. “*I am nothing*”
3. “*I gain nothing*”

Love, when it comes to God and the things pertaining to God, love **is** everything! Perhaps that is because “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8). When we start doing things without love being the motive, we start veering away from the gospel. Consider Paul’s admonishment to “**speak the truth in love**” to help one another grow in Christ (Eph 4:15). Love is powerful indeed if other **good** things are rendered useless when not accompanied by love.

Love Saves Us from Ourselves

One way of measuring power could be the ability of something to overcome something else. For example, a side of a mountain is overcome by dynamite as its “power” brings it down. As Christians, we strive to be like Christ, but the problem is there are things in our lives, which are ingrained into who we are and make us

different than who Christ is. What we need is something powerful enough to help us overcome it. Enter love.

Let's look at two conflicting forces.

1 John 2:15 - "*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*"

The very nature of the love of God is to be selfless; however, the love of the world is selfishness. Or as stated later in the verse "*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world*" (1 John 2:16).

The love of the world and things in the world is *powerful*. I believe we are all living examples to confirm this. How many times has our will power failed us when it comes to our diet, exercise, study, or _____ (insert your issue here) goals? How many times have we said "I am going to quit _____" and then not quit it? These are just the symptoms of the real problem, *US*. We eat chocolate cake because *WE* like it. Perhaps the verse says, "*If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" because when the love of God is perfected in us, there is no room for selfish love because they are in themselves opposites. That's what all of us need to overcome *ourselves*, love.

Consider this passage Paul writes contrasting selfishness and selflessness.

Philippians 2:3-8 - "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"



We learn love by Jesus, namely His example. An almighty God in the perfection of heaven comes to earth with full knowledge of the pain and humiliation he would face in life and in death. What possibly would have the power to remove Jesus – He who made all creation, from heaven to earth? Nothing except the power of love (cf. John 1:1-5). And that is our cure for the disease of selfishness; the love of God. Now that is powerful – something which would make us want to remove *ourselves* from our thoughts and replace it with others.

Love and the Gospel

Considering the fact God is love, it is not surprising it would be the defining characteristic of the gospel. Consider this passage in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul states what the gospel is.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - “*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*”

Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus was raised from the dead. These things *are* the gospel. Taking a second glance at a verse we looked at earlier, reference 1 John 3:16. The gospel is our example of knowing love. But why is dying such an act of love? Again, reference a previously discussed passaged (Rom 5:6-8). It is because the gospel saves us. Similar to taking a bullet for someone (i.e., die for someone), you have “*saved*” them.

Romans 1:16 - “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*”

Now talk about powerful. It has the ability to save someone and to preserve a life. Or perhaps more specifically in the case with us and the gospel, it does not save us in the sense in which we do not die (physically), but rather we are saved in the sense in which we will die but yet be raised from the dead. Raising someone from the dead is a *power*, reserved only for God. It is a power unattainable by anyone else without Him.

Not only is the gospel founded on love, but love is how it is spread. Look at this passage in Ephesians.



Ephesians 4:15 - “*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.*”

If we are going to spread the gospel, our message should be love but also spoken in love to the recipients. Take this verse from 1 John.

1 John 4:20 - “*If anyone says, ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*”

The very essence of the example of Jesus is sacrificing yourself for people who do not know you. That is how God’s message will be spread. If a group of Christians is all about the truth but does not show love, they undermine the gospel. God is then mocked by those who see them. They may say, “They call themselves ‘Christians,’ yet they are mean and rude and think only of themselves.” If we are going to be the lights in the world that God needs us to be, then we will show the love of God because love defines God’s people.

John 13:35 - “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

Love has everything to do with the gospel; and thereby, love has everything to do with us.



Conclusion

We *all* need more love (that is the love for God and the Love from God). Even though it is not seen with the eye, it can still be sought after with all your strength using your heart, soul, and mind (Luke 10:27). Therefore, let us seek the love of God and strive to serve one another rather than ourselves. And, the power of this love will completely change our lives for the better. Amen.



Acts 26:18 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.

Light Lesson 14 Questions

Seen and Unseen: Powerful but Can't See It: Love

1. What does it really mean to *see*? What does it mean to *know* something? What are the similarities and/or differences between seeing and knowing something?

2. Why do you think something so powerful like love is ignored or misconstrued?

3. If you had to define love in your own words how would you put it?

4. What other aspects of love make it powerful? Why would you say those aspects make it powerful?

5. If love truly is this powerful, how do we as messengers of God make it part of our lives and our message?

6. Self-reflection: Consider your walk with your brothers and sisters in Christ. What can you do, say, think, etc. show more of the power of love?

Light Lesson 15

Seen and Unseen:

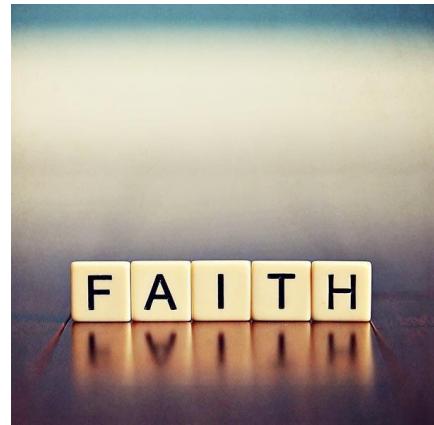
Powerful but Can't See Them

by Daniel Sanders

There are many things in our life we can see, feel, and touch. The things we see we can know are very powerful – for instance, a lion, a train, an airplane, even a bulldozer. When we see them with our eyes and see the tasks and abilities they can do, we are certain they are very powerful. In life, people try on their own to make things with more power!

How much more is it then when we talk about God (**1 Cor 1:25**)? The things in this world we assume are strong are weak compared to God. The scripture reminds us that weakness (though there is no weakness with God) is stronger and wiser than man. God has used the invisible things in this world to show His strength further.

One example is the source of our faith. Faith is defined in **Hebrews 11:1** as “*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” The faith that does save us (**Heb 11:6**) is one that believes **and** diligently seeks God! Let’s take some time to examine the things God shows us. These are things we may not be able to see but indeed are powerful!



Grace

By the grace of God, the hope of heaven has been offered to us (**1 Pet 1:3**). It is a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is through the grace of God we can be made alive.

Grace is defined as: “(1) Favor; good will; kindness; disposition to oblige another; as a grant made as an act of grace. (2) Appropriately, the free unmerited love and favor of God, the spring and source of all the benefits men receive from him. (3) Favorable influence of God; divine influence or the influence of the spirit, in renewing the heart and restraining from sin.” (Webster Dictionary)

By God's grace through faith, we can be saved by grace. (**Eph 2:1-10**). Paul mentions we have been saved by grace through faith. Even in our time of sin and separation from God, God's grace may abound (**Rom 5:6-11**). God demonstrated His love (Grace) in that while we were still dead in sin, Christ died for the ungodly.

For grace to abound, we are to transform our lives. We are to open our eyes to no longer walk as the rest of the world walks, alienated from God (**Eph 4:17-24**). For us to be saved by grace through faith, we are to make a transformation in our life, leaving the paths of sin to walk in the light. The ways that corrupt and separate an individual from God are sin. We are to be transformed through the renewing of our minds. We are to have faith in God and follow the example of Christ.

In fact, we are Christ's workmanship as we read earlier and are created in Christ through baptism (**Rom 6:1-4**). The question asked is: Can grace abound while we are in sin? The answer is no! We can be found pleasing to God by doing what he says in answering the call of baptism and becoming a new person in Christ!

We, as people, can be called blessed even though we have never seen the Lord with our own eyes (**John 20:29**). Thomas needed the proof to believe Jesus arose from the dead. But even further in what speaks to us today, people who have not seen the Lord can be blessed if we are willing to follow Him. This is where our faith comes in even more. Through reading the testimony in the scriptures of many, we can now follow and obey the Lord so that grace may abound! It comes through walking by faith and not by sight (**2 Cor 5:7**). We should place our trust in God who we do not see yet are to believe in. We are to trust that He is (**Heb 11:6**) and that he rewards those who diligently seek Him!

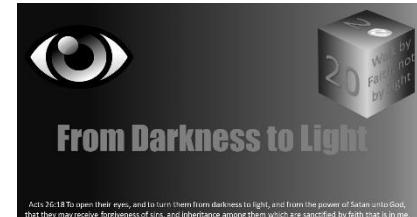


Mercy

The Lord has been gracious to us to be found pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ. In Christ, He has offered us a living hope of eternal rest! We can because of grace be found favorable. In our life of service, we can realize His grace is there, and it is comforting in seeing such things!

Mercy is defined as: “That benevolence, mildness or tenderness of heart which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves; the disposition that tempers justice, and induces an injured person to forgive trespasses and injuries, and to forbear punishment, or inflict less than law or justice will warrant.” (Webster’s Dictionary) In this sense, there is perhaps no word in our language precisely synonymous with mercy. That which comes nearest to it is grace. It implies benevolence, tenderness, mildness, pity or compassion, and clemency, but exercised only towards the offenders.

Just for a moment, take a deep breath with me. The reason why I ask you to do this is that God will be merciful to us up to the last breath we take. His patience when we have stumbled and his mercy is available as we live (**Heb 8:12**).



We read about Christ being compassionate and merciful. Consider some of these examples in **Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mark 1:41; 6:34; Luke 7:13; and James 5:11**. In many of these verses, He was compassionate and merciful to them. He healed the sick, raised some from the dead, fed them because they were hungry, and saw they needed a shepherd. Indeed, the Lord was compassionate and merciful to those and still shows His mercy to us.

Jesus also took the time to teach us about being compassionate and merciful to others. In **Matthew 18:21-35**, we see the parable of the unforgiving servant. This servant had a debt he would never be able to pay in his lifetime. He came to his master and asked for mercy. He and his family were about to be sold into slavery to try and recover some of the debt. But his master was moved with compassion and forgave him the debt. What do you think would happen with this servant?

In some cases, you would think he should go and do likewise to others. But instead, he found a fellow servant, charged him, grabbed him by the throat, and said, “pay me what you owe!” This fellow servant asks for mercy. He would try to pay the debt, but the servant who was given mercy did not show the same. It was then reported back to the master of what was done. The master was no longer merciful to this servant. Christ taught in this parable that we are to be merciful and compassionate to others. What a powerful message to us! If we show mercy to

others, we may not see the results of such things personally, but that can go a long way in drawing others to Christ (**1 Tim 4:16**).

Kindness

Have you ever thought of how much one small kind act can do to someone? When I was younger, I once helped a widow whose refrigerator stopped working. She had found a replacement at Habitat for Humanity and asked me if I could help her transport it to her house. After traveling there and back and then realizing the refrigerator was too big for the door, I went home and grabbed some tools to take the door apart. The whole event took about three hours. Later, when we plugged in the fridge, she started crying. She said, "You don't know how much this means to me." She went to offer me money, and I said, "No." Instead replied, "I may need to come to you for a favor, and you can pay it back then!"



Simply put, a small deed goes a long way. We may not see the effect it has on others. However, it rarely goes unnoticed. A small deed may consist of a smile, a kind word, a hug, a visit, a phone call, a text, or just offering some sort of help. These are just a few examples. It does not take much to do these things, but the impact it has on others goes a long way.

Kindness is part of fulfilling our work and commands from Christ (**Mark 12:31**). We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. If I want someone to show me kindness, I must show kindness to others. We may question who my neighbor is. The answer is those whom we encounter! That is who our neighbor is! The question can be better answered in **Luke 10:25-37**. The Good Samaritan found this Jewish man half dead. He took the man and bandaged up his wounds. That would have been enough and kind. But he didn't stop there. He placed him on his animal and took him to an inn and cared for him. That would have been enough and kind. But he didn't stop there. He took money and gave it to the innkeeper and said, "take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you." He went above and beyond the call of duty with kindness. He demonstrated the old saying, "kill them with kindness."

We are commanded to show kindness to others (**Matt 25:34-46**). When Jesus was asked about when did we do kind works to you, He said that when you do it to others, you are doing it to me! Just let that sink in. Even though we have

not seen the Lord with our eyes, when we show kindness to others, we are doing it to him.

When I think about the impact kindness can have on others, I am reminded of a movie titled “Pay It Forward.” In the movie, a young boy in elementary school is asked by his teacher, “What can we do to change the world?” His idea was to pick three people to show kindness. After he performed a kind act, he said to those three, “Pay it forward to another three and ask the same to the next person you meet.” Two of them did not work out as planned, but the third did. The results of his idea led to a TV station a couple of hundred miles away wanting to do a story on it. When they traced the story back to the source, they found the young boy who said, “I just wanted to show kindness.” The moral of all this is to show kindness to others.

We do not know who or how kindness will impact someone. What we do know is if we do not show it, others will not be impacted. And as a result, we are sinning against God. Show kindness, and let others see the light that is in us (**Matt 5:14-16**)

The Joy and Hope of Eternal Life

None of us here on earth have seen heaven with our own eyes. It is written that there is a place prepared for the faithful. We have some description of it found in **Revelation 21**. You read about all the precious jewels, stones, and metals that make up this place. These are things with which we associate our eyes. The descriptions are just a glimpse of what it will be. It is a far better place. It is a place Jesus has gone and prepared for us (**John 14:1-6**). A place where we can rest. It is a beautiful place the faithful can hope to see one day!



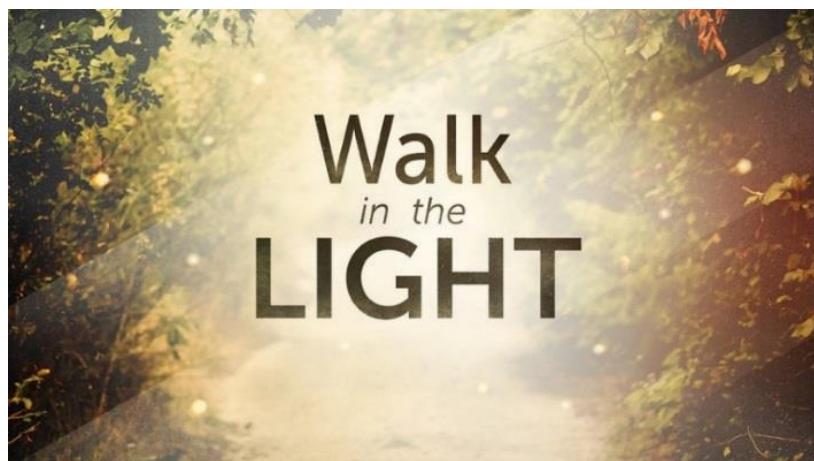
I am reminded of why we have not seen heaven (**Rom 8:24**). Things that we hope for are things that we have not seen. If we saw heaven, would we hope for it the same way? The answer is no! When seeing something, our hope may not be as it should be. This is where a building block in our relationship with God is more of a driving force now, and our faith comes more into play (**Heb 11:1**). Again, we are reminded faith is “*the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen.*” The things we can see with our eyes here on earth are temporary (**2 Cor 4:18**). They will rust, corrode, decay, and can be taken from us. But there are

treasures stored in heaven that will not have the same effect. Where is your heart (**Matt 6:19-21**)?

There is a living hope being built in us (**1 Pet 1:3**). It is a hope that God has placed in our heart if we will believe (**1 Cor 2:9**). It is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ that this is possible! This is my hope, and I pray it is yours too! God has promised eternal life for those who will follow Him. It is for those who will love Him and obey Him. We are waiting on God's great and precious promise. God always keeps His promises. I am looking forward to my eyes beholding heaven on that day!

Conclusion

God has blessed us with many powerful things that we cannot see, but these gifts and promises work beneficially for us! These are things that can influence others too! God's grace is available for all (**John 1:17**) through Jesus Christ. God is merciful to us (**Heb 2:17**), willing to forgive us and has given us a faithful High Priest making the way possible through His life! For us, we are to be kind to one another (**Eph 4:32**). The work of kindness spreads and shares quickly. Through all this, we are working and looking to the hope and joy of eternal life (**1 Pet 1:8**). The question is, are you ready?



Light Lesson 15 Questions

Seen and Unseen: Powerful but Can't See Them

1. How are strong in the flesh and strong in God different?
2. Why does seeing things powerful but invisible take faith?
3. Define grace. How can grace abound? Why is grace important?
4. What impact does grace have on the lives of Christians?
5. How does grace cause one to walk by faith and not sight?
6. Define mercy. If we are merciful, who will show us mercy? How can we show mercy to others? How are grace and mercy different?
7. What do we learn from the servants in Matthew 18:21-35?
8. What draws others to Christ? (See 1 Tim 4:16 and 1 Pet chapters 2 and 3.)
9. How can we show kindness to others? What impact can kindness have on one another?
10. Someone once said, “Kindness is often seen by the blind and heard by the deaf.” How does kindness fit in the good works in Ephesians 2:10 and Titus 2:14?
11. What is the joy and hope for us? When will the faithful and obedient be able to see it?
12. Joy and hope are part of grace not yet revealed completely to us. Is this joy and hope a get-out-of-suffering-free card? (See 1 Pet.) What do joy and hope look to?
13. What other things are powerful but not visible?

Light Lesson 16

Walking in the Light:

Walking by Faith, Not by Sight

by Ethan R. Longhenry

Introduction

The human eye remains a marvel. The more we learn about how the eye and the brain function, the more impressed we are at its complexity and amazed that we can even see at all. Through enhancements, people can see stars and galaxies millions of light years away; they can also see down to the atomic level.

Yet, in all of this, we tend to take vision for granted and rely on it by default. The old adage “seeing is believing” exists for a reason; we tend to trust what we see with our eyes and have difficulty imagining anything beyond what we can see. By default, we tend to want to walk by sight: to see where we are going and to see what is ahead. Few things terrify us more than the prospect of some lurking danger or hazard which we cannot see.

Meanwhile, the more we can “see,” the more we learn just how limited our vision proves to be. We have learned how other animals have a greater depth of visions than humans do. We may be able to see all kinds of things thanks to enhancements like telescopes or microscopes, yet that knowledge only magnifies how little we are actually able to see just with our naked eye. We are also learning how our brain sometimes plays tricks on us and “sees” things that are not really there or forms the image of things in ways that are not consistent with how they look in reality. “Seeing is believing” leads to a warped sense of reality!

Faith and Sight

What is true about our physical sight is also true about our spiritual faith and knowledge. The Apostle Paul declared that Christians walk by faith, not by sight, in 2 Corinthians 5:7. He did so while encouraging the Christians in Corinth regarding their hope that Jesus would return one day to judge the world in righteousness and raise and transform the dead for immortality (2 Cor 4:7-5:10).

Throughout time mankind has known, for certain, that everyone dies, and the dead stay dead. We know this because we have seen that everyone has died, and those who have died stay dead. The disciples who followed Jesus knew this as well and were astonished when confronted with all the evidence that Jesus arose from the dead (Luke 24:36-43). Upon hearing the claim of Jesus’ resurrection

from fellow disciples, Thomas insisted he would not believe unless he had concrete, physical evidence. Jesus appeared to him and gave him every reason to believe; Thomas declared Jesus was his Lord and God (John 20:24-28). Jesus asked Thomas if he believed because he saw, and then Jesus pronounced a powerful blessing: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29).

The resurrection of the dead, therefore, well demonstrates the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight. It has been almost 2,000 years since anyone has seen the Lord Jesus in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-11). The entire Christian faith is dependent on the truth of the resurrection: if Jesus is not risen from the dead, then their faith is a lie, and those who believe it are to be most pitied in the world (1 Cor 15:12-20). None of us have seen a resurrection like Jesus' resurrection; the scientific world considers it an impossibility. When we hear the claim that Jesus is risen from the dead, and all those who trust in Jesus will likewise obtain the resurrection from the dead on the final day, we either can accept the witness of the Apostles and other eyewitnesses and believe it or go with what seems to make sense to us according to the ways of the world and deny it. We either walk by faith, or we walk by sight.

Walking by faith involves much more than trusting that God has raised Jesus from the dead; it also demands confidence that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). If Jesus is Lord and Christ, then He reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords; we must serve Him and do what He says (1 Tim 6:14-16). Yes, we must mentally accept the proposition that Jesus is Lord and Christ, but we must also act like it, and this is where the difficulty enters. Jesus and the Apostles said, taught, and practiced things which prove very difficult. Jesus demands us to love our neighbor, to pray for those who persecute us, to take up our cross daily and to follow Him in the way of suffering, humiliation, and shame, perhaps unto death (Matt 5:21-48; 16:24-27; Luke 6:27-36).

The issue is never in those situations and circumstances in which people agree with Jesus' teachings; the issue is always where Jesus' teachings go against what people have been taught by their families, cultures, teachers, etc. What happens when everything we "know" comes up against what Jesus has taught? Most people, unfortunately, will again choose to walk by sight: they will follow what they think is right and good, based on what they have learned from family, culture, education, etc., and thus reject Jesus as Lord by their deeds (Matt 7:13-14, 21-27). A few, however, will be like Peter in John 6:68-69, and ask where else they could go, for they know Jesus has the words of life, and have come to believe

that He is the Holy One of God. Peter did not declare that he had perfect understanding and insight as to what Jesus taught; Peter declared His trust and confidence that Jesus is who He said He is.

Ultimately, to walk by faith is to maintain the same posture as Peter did in John 6:68-69. It is easy for us to think we are walking by faith when we are really still walking by sight, only going as far as we feel comfortable trusting in Jesus. Walking by faith is not blind faith: we have every reason for confidence in God based on what He has promised and done for our fathers through the prophets and in Jesus (Heb 1:1-3). Instead, walking by faith is trust: trust in God in Christ not only when it makes complete sense to us to trust in God, but especially when it seems to no longer make any sense. As the heavens are higher and greater than the earth, so God and His ways are higher than our ways (Isa 55:8-9). There is so much going on in the creation which we will never understand no matter how far we look or how deep we plumb (Deut 29:29; Job 38:1-41:34). We become puffed up when we think we know things (1 Cor 8:1); we do better to repent in dust and ashes like Job and recognize we often think and speak of things well beyond us (Job 42:1-6).

God does not expect us to see everything or know everything; God knows our limitations, for He has made us, and takes pleasure in us as His creation (Psa 8:1-9). But God does expect us to realize there is far more going on out there than we can understand, and to perceive trusting our senses alone will fail us. And so, we do well to walk by faith, not by sight trusting in God no matter what the circumstance looks like, and seeking to live like Jesus in thought, word, and deed, to obtain the resurrection of life and to see God face to face for all eternity!



Light Lesson 16 Questions

Walking in the Light: Walking by Faith, Not by Sight

1. How can walking by sight warp our sense of reality?

2. What is the context of 2 Corinthians 5:7? What is Paul's bigger point or discussion?

3. What was Jesus' blessing in John 20:29? Explain it.

4. How does Christ's resurrection cause those living in 2020 to live by faith or sight? How do we know if we are walking by faith or sight?

5. What is the faith not sight demand of 1 Timothy 6:14-16?

6. What was Peter's posture in John 6:68-29?

7. What prevents us from placing our trust, confidence, reliance, and dependence in God?

8. What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight?

Light Lesson 17

Walking in the Light:

Walking as Children of Light

by Shawn Bain

To become children of light, our first observation should be in **Ephesians 5:8-10.** “*...For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*”

What is there in that passage which stands primary to your walk in life?

We do not have trouble walking in the light. It is walking in the dark which troubles us most, because we cannot see where we are going. If we are used to walking in a particular place in the light, we still have trouble walking in the dark. As a result, we put light in a parking lot. We put a “night-light” in a hallway. We want to see where we walk at night. Beloved, as Christians, ***we are children of night-light***, because we live in a world where people love darkness (**John 3:19-21**).

Let's understand something very basic. Light and Dark are so, so, so opposite. We know and can tell the difference. As Christians in the world, we are so, so, so opposite that of the character of the world. At times the distinction is not so clear, and the color we illuminate looks more like gray. Being gray or in the middle is a place some would rather be than the extreme of light or dark. We often think to make a difference, you have to abide by **1 Corinthians 9:22:** “*I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.*” That passage is pulled completely out of context in an effort to minimize the difference in believers and unbelievers. We say they are “good people” and fail to



speak truth lest it becomes offensive. We blend and become gray and neither white or black (i.e., light or dark).

The other idea we have is to never come in contact with the world. We are too pure. We are too good to get mixed up in all this ‘trash.’ The world has so much darkness and immorality, we refuse to be as Jesus exhorted the apostles in **John 17:15-18** and as Paul said to Christians at Ephesus in **Ephesians 5:8** to be a light and impact those who are unbelievers to be children of light.

Where does a Christian draw the line in a dark world to become light and make a difference for good as the light of the world?

Scripture says in **2 Corinthians 4:3-5**, Satan is the one blinding the gospel, not only to the unbelieving, but also the believer. Satan wants the dark and the gray to appear in our minds, not the light. If the gospel comes out, it shows the true color of him and sin - BLACK. In v.6 lies the responsibility of the Christian, “*light shall shine out of darkness.*” God looks for those He brought from the darkness to light to shine and be children of light. As **1 Thessalonians 5:5** says, “*For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.*” If we are to be this light, then take heed to the following...

Be Imitators of God - Ephesians 5:1

As God’s children, imitating God should be a passion, because we are born of Him. As **1 John 1:5-7** says, “*God is light, in him is no darkness at all...walk in the light, as he is in the light.*” If we decide to walk in darkness while calling our self a child of God, a child of light, we are A LIAR.

Carefully understand this! God is the illumination of His children. This allows us the privilege to illuminate. Without God, there is no light.

What one thing could you do for God to display His illumination in the world?

Children illuminate everything about their parents. **This is a serious matter.** Children tell the truth about everything their parents do; what they will and will not let them do; if they are loving or hateful; if they are caring or do not care; if they are firm or indifferent. In many ways, children carry a reflection of their parents everywhere they go. Parents may think many of the problems a child has comes from their teacher, friends, TV, or environment. It is really a child's exposure to their parents is why thy child becomes who they are, which is either light or darkness. In the same fashion, what we do is showing people who God is to us.



Imitate God. Walk in love as Christ loved. Forgive. Do not participate in filthiness. The most significant point to consider here is being like God is attainable. We are not speaking of perfection. We are talking character, nature, and identity.

Who are you? Define who you are to someone?

Are you born of God of the water and the spirit? _____

Will those who see and hear you say I can see you walk like the FATHER - God?

Our Light Depends Upon Our Exposure to God

The more exposure to the light (God), the more we are children of light. We emit His glory because of our constant, diligent exposure to Him. The opposite is true as well. The less we allow our self to be exposed to God, the less light and the greater the darkness is within us.

Some children grow up in life and have NO FATHER who lives with them. They are born of a father but are never exposed to him. Some are exposed every other weekend. Some see a father on holidays. Other children never hear or know who their father is. The absence of a father is what 15 million children in the U.S. experience (1 out of 3 children). Almost 40% of children 1st - 12th grade have no father at home. The problem is fathers voluntarily abandon their children.

What do you believe the impact is of a child living in a fatherless home?

Having a fatherless home, “It is the engine driving many social problems in our society” (David Blankenhorn). Those without a father are 63% of youth suicides (5x the average); 90% of homeless/ runaway children; 85% of childhood behavioral problems (20x the average); 80% of rapists & anger problems; 71% of high school dropouts; 85% of youths in prison; greater levels of aggression among boys; lower average income level; greater use of drugs & alcohol; and increased rates of relationship problems.

The reason for the above information shows us on a social level the more exposure to a father the less likelihood of sin, social problems, better achievement, and behavior. Spiritually identical to this is the more light we shine depends upon our exposure to God.

What places and what means do Christians have to be exposed to God versus the choice of being exposed to the dark world?

Matthew 5:14, 16 speaks to disciples as being light to bring the vision of glory to God to the hearts of others. That is not possible when you are not exposed to His light always. Glory never comes to God if all we ever receive from God is a once a week morsel of a taste of the righteousness of God. A Christian may speak with pride of the church is where they worship, but the



amount of light from a church is determined by how much those in it, His children, are exposed to God, the light.

Reprove the Darkness - Ephesians 5:11-13

We can imitate God and constantly expose our self to Him, but as a Christian, delivered from the darkness of the world into the kingdom (**Col 1:12, 13**), we need to reprove the darkness.

Having first been converted to the Lord as a child of light, we may still have a familiar taste with the world and its ways because the world was a part of us (**Eph 5:7**). Being a Christian does not negate any pressure to being drawn back into darkness. We will always be pressured to imitate the world in which we live. We are advertised to, exhorted to, and entertained to be in the darkness as the world is. People we love and who love us tempt us and want us to do like they do in every way. The pressure placed upon the Christian is to go back. It was a mistake to deny self. It was a poor choice to be godly. The great assignment is to go forward, though the battle between darkness and light, flesh and spirit takes place (**Gal 5:16, 17**).

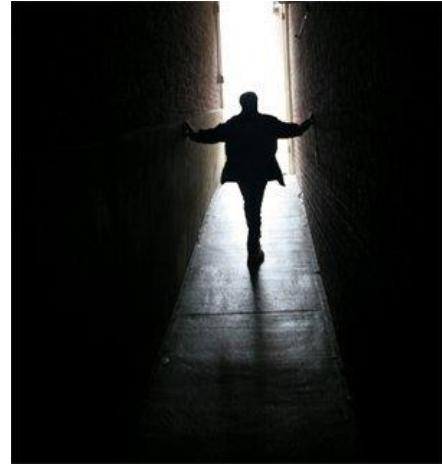
What can you do as a Christian to prevent yourself from becoming like 2 Peter 2:20-22?

Some Christians would rather silently bemoan the plight of the world and the society in which their children will be raised. We might speak against what the world does to those already walking in the light, but what are we saying to those who daily live in darkness? Christians are striving for holiness and should reprove those in darkness with a simple question to the one in sin. “What chance is there for your life to have full blessings living in darkness?”

What could a Christian say to one living in darkness for them to see the richness of spiritual blessings?

Christians need to know if they expose the darkness of sin, the reproved sin may continue. Yet it does not prevent us from exposing sin the next time. We can no longer be silent. We should speak truth in a culture who redefines sex, marriage, and the meaning of right and wrong.

The Christian in the light is to “*expose*” evil for what it is. Sin is awfulness. Silence may encourage, which increases the chance this immoral attitude or action continues. It is not only by saying, “I wish you would not say or do that in my presence,” but show the truth of what God says about such action and what actions God accepts and favors. **2 Timothy 4:2** says “*preach the word, be urgent in season, out of season...*” Truth may be appreciated. It may not. It may not be liked, yet the reproving of sin is our responsibility as children of light.



In the midst of reproving, a Christian can show as children of light the opposite of what the world would do. They are selfish, but we are giving. They curse; we bless. They live for self; we live for God and others. They lie; we speak the truth. The point is children of light, who take sin seriously by being saved, need not wink at it, laugh at it, or say “I’m glad I stopped doing that.” Confront the sin, whether it is or is not the same sin in which you engaged. It is not that you are eager to hear of the sins of others. We share the truth to expose the shame to bring the soul to Jesus Christ. Reprove it. Do not gossip about it. Hold up scripture as the pattern of life for all men/women, because showing the scripture places the light upon God not upon you.

Bear the Fruit of Children of Light - Ephesians 5:9,10

This passage is an evidence producer and reality of those who are children of light. Christians are to be fruit bearers like **Galatians 5:22, 23** says. Changed people lived changed lives. Those who lived the light producing changed life are examples of the following.



“*Goodness*” - This is the “uprightness of heart and life.” As we would speak of God as good, this speaks of godliness in the motives, thoughts, and actions of children of light. Goodness is a definite godly

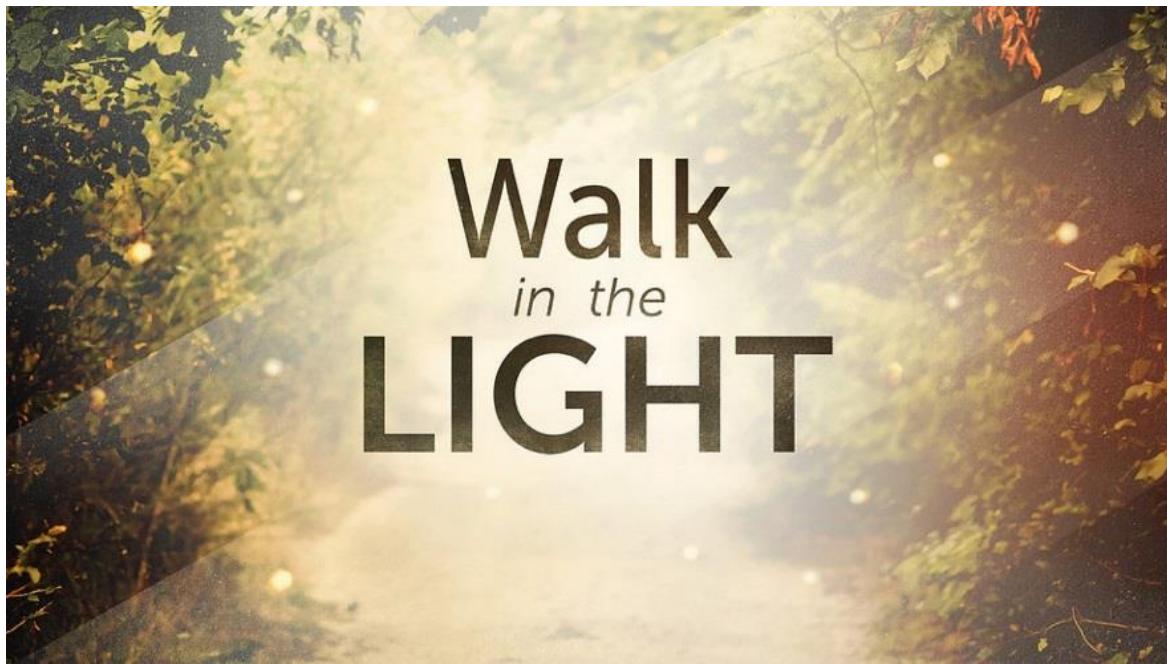
trait. It is not only speaking of God as good, and what He says as good. Goodness in children of light will catch the attention of others as kind, loving, caring, helping, and serving.

“Righteousness” - This word is where a child of light stands. We walk and live on the path of right, because our salvation made us right, and we are constantly loyal and honest to what is right (**Titus 2:11, 12**). Right is who we are. Righteousness is what we have from Christ Jesus who lived righteous (**Acts 10:34, 35**).

“Truth” - No one is as honest, reliable, and more trusting than children of light. When these people daily live in the world, the world sees them as a great contrast to the hypocritical, deceptive, and false ways of society. Let us never be guilty of putting off a false light by telling people one thing but presenting something else.

“Goodness” is a matter of our relationship with others. **“Righteousness”** deals with our relationship with God. **“Truth”** deals with the personal integrity of our own lives. These three fruits come from children of light. All these fruits please God because they are just like God (**Col 1:9-13**).

As children of light who **ARE** like Him now, we **WILL BE** like Him in glory! Walking in the light is a choice for today and a choice for the future...



Light Lesson 18

Walking in the Light: Marriage

Building Your Dream Home (Part 1)

by Johnny Felker

Introduction

Ephesians 5:8 teaches us, who in the past were in darkness, to walk as children of light. We want to walk as children of light in our marriages, knowing God will bless us in our obedience. In thinking about marriages, the eyes of our heart allow us to envision what God wants us to practice in our marriages.

You can see this in probably any area of the US, but this story comes from Alabama. A couple had begun work on what they had called their “dream house”—a beautiful, roomy, modern house in the country. Work had already begun. The land was cleared, the foundations laid, and the basement constructed. But then suddenly the building stopped.

The couple had started having marital problems they could not resolve. Soon after, they got a divorce, and the dream house they had planned together was never completed. Their partially built house was a constant reminder of their failed marriage.

So often it is the case that couples put far more thought into building their dream “house” than they do in building the “dream home” that will live in the house. With that in mind, let’s think about “How to Build Your Dream Home.”

The fundamental idea of this series is simple. If we want to build a dream home, we must do the same things we would do in building a dream house.

Consult the Architect

Most people would never think of building a house without first consulting with an architect either directly or indirectly. Some cities will not allow you to build a house without a plan approved by an architect. The issue is simple: Everyone needs to know the design of their house is structurally sound, that it will stand up over time, and withstand the storms that might come against it. Yet, many people start a home without much, if any, thought to the architect’s plan for their home. Both



couples and parents do not always consider the expertise of the architect when they think about what their home should be like.

The architect of the home is God.

The family is His institution. His plan for the composition of the home is revealed in a straightforward manner in Genesis 1-2. But if it is important to recognize that God is the architect of the home, it is equally important to understand the purposes the Architect had in mind when creating the home.

God's architectural plan for the home had multiple purposes.

His plan would provide a means of filling the earth He had made with inhabitants (Gen 1:28). It would provide companionship and mutual fulfillment of both the husband's and wife's needs (Gen 2:18). It would provide a safe environment to nurture children (Eph 6:4; Gen 18:19). It would constitute an important component for a stable society and civilization (Prov 14:34). It would be a place to teach the principles of love and service (Gal 5:13). It would be a type of Christ and His church (Eph 5:32).

God envisions a happy home to those who follow His plan.

Sometimes people use their pursuit of happiness as justification for discarding God's plan. But the truth is, God did not create the home to make people miserable, but rather to enhance their personal well-being. He wants your home to be beautiful. And the Scriptures often describe the joys of marriage and family (Prov 5:18; 18:22; Eccl 9:9; Deut 24:5; Prov 23:24).

In contrast, failure to follow God's plan can bring disaster.

Probably everyone has heard of the collapse of a building because the builder didn't respect the designs suggested by the architect. Similarly, people try to circumvent the design of the Creator when building their godly homes:



- Some will treat marriage as a merely human contract to be discarded at will and without consequence.
- Some will seek to make a home composed of people of the same sex.
- Some will seek to experience sexual fulfillment without the commitment and bonds of matrimony.

These human substitutions not only militate against the purpose of the Architect; they also punish the misguided builders! Today we are paying an expensive price in personal and social pain for dysfunctional people raised in dysfunctional homes.

Divorce breaks down the social structure of society. Lack of proper nurture manifests itself in rebellion against authority and personal disrespect that leads to immoral living. Remember this verse: “UNLESS the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain” (Psa 127:1).

Lay a solid foundation

In July 2017, several houses in Land O’ Lakes, Florida suffered collapse due to an expanding sinkhole underneath them. It happens periodically in Florida as well as other parts of the country. Thankfully in those cases no one was injured or killed by the collapse, but several years ago a Florida man lost his life in a similar incident which occurred at night while he was in bed. The earth simply swallowed up the man and his surroundings. In the aftermath of these experiences, other residents of the area naturally were quite on edge for quite a while since they too wondered if such a thing could happen to them also. It is understandable they would be anxious about the possibility that their homes were built on inadequate foundations also.



If building on a solid foundation is essential in building a house, how much more when seeking to build our dream homes. Jesus used that very analogy of building on rock or building on sand to stress the importance and wisdom of listening to His sayings rather than rejecting them (Matt 7:24-27).

Likewise, our homes must be built on a solid footing. The Architect has given us the principles that will enable our marriages and homes to succeed. Let's consider some components of that solid foundation.

Faith in God

Some would not think of faith in God as foundational to a happy home, but we cannot underestimate the value of this principle for more than one reason. First, faith provides the motivation to listen to the Architect's directions. And we have every reason to believe those directions are given with divine wisdom and care for us (Deut 6:24). Second, faith acknowledges the accountability that keeps us honest in our relationships. We know we must ultimately answer to the Creator for our conduct (2 Cor 5:10).

We cannot read the NT without seeing that our conduct in the home, as in all relationships, is tied to our relationship to God and His Son Jesus Christ (Titus 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:7; 1 Tim 5:8).

Someone may question, "Are you saying unbelievers and atheists can't have a happy home?" No, but even in their case, if they succeed, it will be because they have embraced the principles God has given, even if they deny their origin. But they will lack the essential motivations to listen to God and do what is right if they become unhappy with the relationship.

In contrast, when two people, united in faith, become marriage partners and parents for life, the quality of their relationship will change. It has to work better because everything Jesus touched became better. If a word from the Lord could make the finest wine in Cana of Galilee, then a word from the Lord can make the finest homes anywhere.

If your faith in God is waning, you are not only risking your soul; you are risking your home. There is a crack in the foundation that needs immediate attention before disaster strikes.

Commitment

God describes commitment with the simple formula “leave and cleave” (Gen 2:24). Both words are important. The word “leave” does not suggest children no longer respect or honor their parents, but it does suggest they are forming a new unit that is independent of their parents.

One judge, when asked why there were so many divorces in his courtroom, responded with a single word--“in-laws.” That should never be. Parents should not interfere with their children’s relationships. And, children need to cut the umbilical cord and take responsibility for the success of their marriages without thinking, “I can always go back home to momma and daddy.” The word “cleave” suggests you are all in for all time. You are not just bodily staying in the house; you are endeavoring to make things work.

Faith in God and the commitment to do right provides the incentive to work things out. This is what I think is especially objectionable about the concepts of people living together without marriage or what is called “trial marriage.” Not only does it defy the will of the Creator who designed marriage to be a committed relationship. It also casts doubt upon the integrity of the commitment. It is like saying, “I am here to stay...while you glance over and see the door is clearly cracked, ensuring the possibility that you can walk out at will.” If you reserve the right to look elsewhere rather than seek to please your mate, there is a crack in the foundation that risks total collapse.

Trust

Husbands and wives cannot be with one another 24/7. Each must believe that the other will be loyal and true when the other is not around. That trust cannot be built by one mate peppering the other with questions about everything they did that day. Instead, it is developed by knowing a person’s character and affirming their loyalty. All of us need to work to build trust.

One way we build trust is doing what we say we will do, being where we say we will be, and being there when we say they will be there. Over time, not keeping our word will erode trust and replace it with cynicism. People will not believe you when you promise anything when they have seen how many times you back out of your promises, leave them stranded, and/or change your plans constantly at someone else’s expense.

The worthy woman received a high compliment in Proverbs 31: “The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain” (Prov 31:11).

Maybe we could learn something from the mistake of the strong man Samson. He was not very wise in the ways of love. He married a Philistine woman, and she was not trustworthy with his secrets. At their marriage feast, Samson proposed a riddle for the entertainment of the guests; however, his wife later persuaded him to reveal his secrets to her. Then she disloyally shared them with her family. The marriage was defeated before it started because of distrust.

A husband and wife need to build trust by faithfulness, by consistency, and by avoiding relationships that appear to compete with their spouse.

Respect

If trust is an essential component of a solid foundation, then so also is respect. Respect is a hard word to define. It combines elements of esteem and consideration.

There is something intrinsic to human nature that seeks to be admired, held in high regard, or appreciated and valued for who they are and/or what they do. Both husbands and wives are urged in Scripture to give honor to one another (1 Pet 3:7; Eph 5:33).



Likewise, respect must also move beyond admiration to consideration. Maybe we could say it is taking that sense of admiration or appreciation and putting it into concrete expressions of kindness and service that meet the needs of their mate. Paul captures the idea in 1 Corinthians 7. It was a “given” with him that any married person would be focused on pleasing the one they had married (1 Cor 7:33-34). We show respect by validation, by allowing a person to express how he feels without judgment or denial.

Love

Of course, one of the most fundamental principles of the home is love. It is the cement that binds all godly qualities into a unified whole (Col 3:14). Love has special applications in marriage since it is a relationship like no other (Titus 2:4-5; Eph 5:25).



Every culture recognizes that love in marriage has multiple dimensions. In the Greek culture, it was born out by the differing words for love in a relationship. The Scriptures likewise suggest that love in marriage has three dimensions. We'll introduce them now and probably speak more about them in later lessons.

Husbands and wives are lovers. Husbands and wives are friends. Husbands and wives are devoted servants. Each of these qualities will make a foundation for your dream home that is strong and permanent.

A collapsing house may be costly and painful, but a collapsing home is far more serious. Thankfully the cracks in the foundation can be repaired and put on a more solid footing. But we each must have the humility to acknowledge where we are causing cracks in the foundation.

Follow the Architect's blueprint for the husband of her dreams

The construction of a dream home begins with the joining of man and woman in marriage; however, it is important that each understand the Architect's plan for their role in the family. So, let's start with a husband built according to the Architect's plan. Hopefully, such a man will be the husband of her dreams as well. God envisions:

A husband who will lead: Of all the images by which to teach men their role, God chose the word "head." The image itself is helpful for many reasons. It reminds us the home is a living organism that must be directed and cared for like a body. It reminds us the head is the seat of wise and considerate planning and direction. It reminds us the head knows well the needs of the body and responds to them.

It is important to note that God did not call the husband the "tyrant" of his home. The tyrant's rule is selfish and abusive of those under his control; the head's rule is selfless and caring of those under his leadership.

The husband finds his analog for headship in the example of Christ; again and again, Paul appeals to Christ's headship as a model for the dream husband (Eph 5:23). The image of man as head of his wife and home suggests that his role is one of leadership.

Feminist interpreters have sought to dismiss the concept of leadership implied in headship by insisting that it means merely "source," not "rule." However, the biblical model clearly suggests the idea of considerate ruling which is accountable to the Creator (1 Tim 3:4-5).

The Greek word for “manages” in this text conveys the idea of being at the front, being the head of, directing, and stepping up to show care or concern and to give help. It is implied in the complementary command to wives to “submit” or “be subject to” her husband.

The dream husband exercises headship by:

- Setting a vision or goals for the family.
- Monitoring the activities of the home so they meet the divinely-planned purposes.
- Exemplifying the character and activities he seeks in others.

A husband who will love: A husband’s leadership must be done in love! Paul once again appeals to the headship of Jesus to direct the dream husband (Eph 5:25-30). Paul appeals to the creation account to guide the dream husband’s thinking about his wife and family. Recalling the method by which woman was first formed—from the man’s own body, he converts the image into action (Eph 5:28-29).

To hate one’s flesh is to fail to nourish and cherish it; to love it is to:

- Nourish—that is, to meet the needs of his wife (physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually).
- Cherish—The Greek word derives from the image of the mother hen spreading her wings over her young to keep them warm. It is used of a mother’s tender care for her children in 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

Peter applies this principle this way: “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet 3:7).

A husband who will provide: the early chapters of Genesis orient us to a concept of manhood that includes provision for one’s wife and children. It was assumed in the statements of Scripture that the man would be the primary “breadwinner;” the woman by dint of her child-bearing role would focus on domestic duty.

There's not anything in Scripture to suggest God's vision for the home was for the woman to bear a child and then put the newborn into Daddy's arms to be "Mr. Mom" while she goes back to making the living. Our modern attempts to feminize men and masculinize women just creates role confusion and competition rather than the complementary interdependence God intended.

I realize this text was not intended to apply to just men in this context; but at least we could affirm that husbands should take its message seriously: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8).

A husband who will sacrificially serve: Through the years I noticed many men who wanted to be the "head of the house" approached that role as if it were permission to be selfish and inconsiderate of the rest of the family. In other words, they could do what they pleased; they could buy what they wanted even if it meant their wives and children did not have what they needed or wanted.

Such men need to contemplate the example of the one we are called to emulate as head—Jesus. "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:26–28).

Men, are you the man of God's vision, the man of your wife's dreams? Do not underestimate your power to help achieve that dream home both you and your wife desire!

Conclusion

As children of light envisioning our dream homes, let us build on the solid foundation that God has planned. We must put faith in God in our marriages and follow God's plan. We must practice commitment, trust, respect, and love with our spouse. Husbands must look to emulate Christ as head of the church in their homes. If we apply these common-sense principles to our homes, we will be well on our way to that dream home every couple seeks. In our next lesson, we will consider three more principles to implement.



Light Lesson 18 Questions

Walking in the Light: Marriage

Building Your Dream Home (Part 1)

1. How do we put faith into our marriages in a practical way?
 2. How do I demonstrate commitment to my spouse?
 3. How do I demonstrate respect to my spouse?
 4. How do I demonstrate love to my spouse? How is that different in how they might demonstrate love to me? Do spouses sometimes speak different love languages?
 5. Considering the standard of Christ as head of the church, what is the proper attitude of a husband toward his role as head of the family? What are the wrong attitudes as the head? What are the parts of the husband's primary responsibilities?

Light Lesson 19

Walking in the Light: Marriage

Building Your Dream Home (Part 2)

by Johnny Felker

Introduction

Ephesians 5:8 teaches us, who in the past were in darkness, to walk as children of light. We want to walk as children of light in our marriages, knowing God will bless us in our obedience. In thinking about marriages, the eyes of our heart allow us to envision what God wants us to practice in our marriages as we study the scriptures.

So often, it is the case that couples put far more thought into building their dream “house” than they do in building the “dream home.” If we want to build a dream home, we must do the same things we would do in building our dream house. Previously, we learned:

- Consult the Architect!
- Lay a solid foundation!
- Follow the Architect’s blueprint for the husband of her dreams!

Follow the Architect’s Blueprint for the Wife of His Dreams!

As God envisions a man who will lead, He also envisions a wife who will follow her husband. “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22). Being “subject” means “to place oneself under the authority or leadership of another.” It is interesting that in the Old Testament, the wife is said to be “*tachat ish*” (“under a husband,” Num. 5:29). The New Testament term for wife “*hupandros*” (Rom 7:2, literally an “under-a-husband woman”) embodies the same concept. The Old Testament term for husband, “*ba’al*,” likewise indicates the husband’s “lordship” over his wife.



As the man has an analog of headship in the Lord, so the wife has an analog of submission in the church. “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the

church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:23–24). The wife is to see the church in its ideal response to Christ, as the pattern for her relationship with her husband. She is to be subject “in everything” (Eph 5:24) and “as is fitting in the Lord” (Col 3:18).

The Bible reveals three keys reasons for this role relationship, all of which are derived from the created order: First, because the man was created first (1 Tim. 2:13). Second, because the woman was made from man (1 Cor 11:8). Third, because the woman was made for man (1 Cor 11:9). Submission is neither a punishment for the woman nor an affirmation that she is inferior to her husband.

God envisions a wife who will respect her husband

“Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respects her husband” (Eph 5:33). Peter states that Sarah showed that respect in her conduct and in her speech toward Abraham (1 Pet 3:6). The Scriptures reveal that a wife can bring great honor to her husband (Prov 12:4). Her behavior gives him standing in the community (Prov 31:23). Her behavior might even lead him to the Lord (1 Pet 3:1-2). The woman is able to respect her husband not only because she knows it is God’s will, but because she “trusts” her husband to love her as himself.

Some women may have difficulty with submission because of a lack of trust in men in general. Perhaps they transfer to their husband the abusive authoritarian power that they saw in their fathers as children. Perhaps their own husbands exercise their rule with abusive power, and this makes trusting them difficult.

If a woman truly believes in her husband’s love, then she can submit “without being frightened by any fear” (1 Pet 3:6). And when she does, she may find rest in this role. (See Ruth 3:1.)

God envisions wife who will help her husband

The woman was made to be man’s “helper” (Gen 2:18). When we say the Lord is our helper in time of trouble (Psa 46:1), we do not by that statement make Him our inferior. Neither does the word “helper” imply the wife is inferior to her husband, but it does suggest that she has been uniquely created to be his complement. Every Biblical passage that defines the woman’s activities as a wife shows her using those unique gifts God has given her to be the fitting complement to the husband (1 Tim 5:14; Titus 2:4-5; Prov 31:10-12).

God envisions a wife who will serve her husband

As the Scripture calls upon men to sacrificially serve for the benefit of their families, wives are encouraged to fulfill the needs of her husband and family. In both cases, a successful marriage depends upon a love that serves the other. It is the hallmark of a Spirit-led life (Gal 5:13). It should be the wife's great pleasure to show her love to her husband:

- By companionship since she was given to him to prevent his loneliness (Gen 2:18).
- By affection and friendship (Titus 2:4).
- By providing sexual fulfillment (Prov 5:15-20; 1 Cor 7:1-5).
- By making her home a place of peace and comfort (Titus 2:5; 1 Tim 5:14).

When the man leads with love and the woman submits to him in respect, they experience a beautiful harmony and a mutual blessing. They may face life and set the course of their joined lives in harmony and peace. Each fulfills the position for which he/she is physically and psychologically prepared by God. Each is made to feel a great sense of value and worth as they contribute to the relationship. Each will find their greatest happiness in fulfilling the role God has given them.

Building Our Dream Home: Decorate the Home with Beautiful Furnishings

Think about how our world would be changed if everybody practiced the righteousness that Jesus taught in his famous mountain sermon. Think about how every relationship of our lives would be changed if we all walked in the light! Think about how every marriage would be changed! If we want to have a dream home, we must decorate it with the beautiful furnishings of righteousness.

Consider these principles from the Sermon on the Mount.



First, do not let anger cause you to be abusive, but instead make reconciliation a priority! (Matt 5:21-26)

Jesus urged his disciples to see that selfish anger is not only sinful; it is also destructive. This is very important to recognize in marriage! Our relationships with our spouses often suffer lasting hurt because we are careless with our words when angry! When we are upset with our spouses, we need to be careful how we communicate our displeasure. Sometimes we can attack the person rather than address the problem and the effect it has on us.

If we are to be righteous, we must not only refrain from abusing others in anger; we must also make efforts to quiet or pacify the anger of our mate – to seek reconciliation. Jesus urged his disciples to honestly acknowledge the dangers that our misdeeds create for others who become angry with us and to take the initiative in pacifying their anger. How can we hope to receive the favor of God in worship while we mistreat others and set the conditions for their sin? What good is it to attend church wanting the favor of God in worship, while we know we are living in disobedience to God and have mistreated someone else – even set the conditions for their sin. Jesus says instead we should seek reconciliation and seek it quickly!

Think of how marriages would be changed if each partner practiced the righteousness Jesus taught! What if every couple determined to never let anger cause them to say or do abusive things? What if each person sought to bring resolution to anger we have caused? If each person in a marriage practiced the righteousness of a true disciple, there would never be angry fights, hurtful words, or unresolved hurts.

Our Dream Home: Keep your desire for your spouse alone! (Matt 5:27-30)

God made us sexual beings. He created the desire of the man for the woman and the woman for the man, but He reserves the fulfillment of that desire for one's marriage alone. As marriage partners, we cannot justify any outlet for sexual desire outside our marriages (Heb 13:4). Many a marriage and lives have been wrecked by marital infidelity.



Jesus teaches the command not to commit adultery requires that we will take precautions not to give place to lust for another person. We will keep our “eyes” on our spouse and not upon another. We must not allow fantasy a place in our thinking (Job 31:1). Jesus stresses that we can't take lust lightly. He uses the most dramatic statements to show how we ought to get a handle on it before it leads us to sin. In this society, such opportunities come to us in ways not available in the past – e-mail solicitations; internet chat rooms, internet porn sites can provide avenues for sinful lust that can lead to betrayal. Beware! Many of us learned a song as children that reminds us: “Oh, be careful little eyes what you see...”

If every person in a marriage practiced the righteousness of a true disciple, there would never be a relationship between a man or woman and a fellow-worker. There would never be the pain of a betrayal, the feelings of shame and inadequacy

that come to those who are the victims of infidelity. There would never be a divorce for fornication!

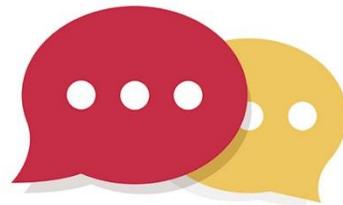
Our Dream Home: “Till death do us part!” (Matt 5:31-32)

Mean it when you say, “till death do us part!” Jesus revealed that his disciples would not put away their wives, for doing so, except in the case of fornication, would make them culpable in the adultery that occurs by marrying another!

What if every marriage partner said, “I want my marriage to last for life? I don’t want to be the cause of my spouse committing adultery because of my divorce!” The divorce lawyers would go out of business. Bitter custody battles would be non-existent. Children would no longer feel responsible for the breakup of their parents’ marriage. Think about how things would be changed if every marriage person practiced the righteousness of a disciple!

Communicate with transparency and honesty! (Matt 5:33-37)

The Law permitted oaths in God’s name but urged God’s people to never take His name in vain by swearing falsely (or using it frivolously). The Pharisees had apparently marshaled this prohibition to support the idea that integrity in speech was only binding when God was the object of the promise. Another text lends itself to the idea that they even made oaths or promises binding based on the sacred object referenced in the oath (cf. Matt 23:16-22)! In contrast, Jesus wanted his disciples to be people of integrity in their speech. They didn’t have to resort to oaths to be believed because they told the truth all the time!



David Mace, the past president of the American Association of Marriage counselors, has said: “Poor communication is the main problem in 86% of all troubled marriages.” Think of the value of honest and transparent communication in marriage. Honesty communication means that there are no hidden relationships or secret activities to be later discovered with great hurt and feelings of disloyalty.

Honest communication means that we reveal our true thoughts in marriage. We should not expect our mate to read our minds; nor should we try to read their minds rather than ask for information. Honest communication means that we speak the truth even when the disclosure may be painful. As marriage partners, we need to set the conditions for honest communication. Do not insist upon the truth and

punish the other person for speaking it. Instead, use that information to make things better. Honest communication means that we keep our promises. When we fail to keep our word, it makes our mates feel disrespected and unvalued. If we can back out of our promises to them, it says they are not very important to us. Something else is more important.

In short, real communication requires both a speaker and a receiver. The speaker must reveal his/her thoughts honestly, tactfully, clearly, honestly. The listener must hear them patiently, with an open heart, and with a desire to respond lovingly. Only then can real honest communication take place.

Be more concerned about generosity than equality! (Matt 5:38-42)

Jesus was concerned about the spirit of our relationships. Do we build them on grace or justice? Building a marriage on grace rather than strict justice is the grounds of a forgiving relationship (cf. Col 3:12-13)! The eye-for-an-eye mentality will destroy any relationship! Building a marriage on grace is also the grounds of a giving relationship. Husbands and wives need the mentality not to say, “I will if you will,” or “I will only give if you will give;” but rather, “I will give more. I will go further.”

Of course, generosity can be exploited. A giving spouse can be abused, taken advantage of, and even neglected. So, every person who enjoys a generous mate should at least ask themselves, “Am I willing to be as generous and giving? Or am I taking advantage of my mate?”

Keep showing love when the other person is least deserving of it!

Jesus in Matthew 5:43-48 extends the principle of grace he had previously expounded. What do you do when someone else is at their worst? Do you become like them? Or, do you keep doing what is right?

As husbands and wives, we need to recognize that everybody has a bad day (work-related or family-related stress, waves of sadness from a past hurtful experience, biological changes, and physical fatigue). These things and more can cause both husbands and wives to be grumpy, moody, unresponsive, and even inconsiderate.

If we can “love our enemies” who do far worse to us, then surely we can love the person we have committed to living with for life! Jesus reminded His disciples of the nature of God’s love. Does God love people based on how deserving they are? Or does He love them because of who He is! It is the latter.

Jesus encouraged His disciples to love others unconditionally, to let their love “be perfect” as that of their heavenly Father. That’s why they could do good to their enemies and pray for those who abused them.

But someone says, “I don’t think I should be a doormat. My husband/wife doesn’t deserve such sacrifices.” Yes, you may be right; but God does! It is God’s unconditional love for us that empowers us to love others unconditionally (Eph 5:1-2)

Serve your mate for God’s glory and not your own. (Matt 7:1-18)

The Pharisees desired to do good things to be seen and commended by others. They prayed where they could be seen by others. They “sounded the trumpet” when they gave alms. They disfigured their faces when they fasted. They wanted the praise of men. So then it is appropriate to ask, “Were they really serving God in what they were doing, or were they engaging in self-serving acts to solicit praise and congratulation from others?” Obviously, it was the latter. In contrast, Jesus taught his disciples that service for the glory and approval of God was sufficient for the truly righteous. To know that we have done what is right in His eyes and that we have glorified Him and will receive His reward is all that matters. This principle is quite applicable to marriage.

What motivates us to serve? Do we spring into action if someone is around who could see our kindness or helpfulness, but become negligent or disinterested when no one is around? What would we be willing to do for our husbands/wives if we knew no one would know what we did for them? Would we be as willing to serve if no one would praise us for being a good husband or wife?

As husbands and wives, we need to serve for God’s glory and not our own. Even in marriage, we need the mindset that says I want to do what pleases God, and it is his reward that I seek in obeying him in marriage. Serving our mates out of selfless motivations manifests the highest level of love for them. We act for their sakes; we act for their good; and we find delight in serving them for no other reason than they will be blessed by our service. This is the noblest love that we can show to our husband or wife!

Manage your finances with faith and wisdom.

Probably one of the top ten causes of marital conflict is disagreement about money. Families often fall prey to materialism in their quest for happiness. They buy into the idea that the more things they have, the happier they will be. And so, they work extra hours to accumulate things. Often marriages suffer from too much time apart and conflicts over what to buy or not to buy.



Moreover, too often, couples get deeply in debt seeking to have too much too soon, and that exacerbates the problem. The home becomes a place of tension and conflict rather than support and peace as bills accumulate and money to pay them is short. Another source of tension between couples involves disagreements about spending versus saving. Many disagreements could be remedied if people would think more spiritually and wisely about material things.

Jesus stressed two principles in His teaching in Matthew 6: First, we need to lay up treasure in heaven, not on earth (Matt 6:19-21). Jesus teaches us not to make the accumulation of money an “end” in itself but rather to let money and things be a “tool” to accumulate spiritual treasures by using them for the good of God’s kingdom. Pursuing wealth can make us slaves of things and keep us from being good servants of God! Consequently, it establishes a value system in marriage that will result in the problems we just mentioned.

Second, we need to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness (Matt 6:33). The endless quest for wealth sometimes betrays a lack of trust in the provision of God. Jesus taught his disciples to live with dependence upon Him and make obedience to Him primary in our lives. Of course, it is foolish, not faithful, to neglect to prepare for our future by anticipating future needs and by saving for life’s emergencies or for failing health that might render us incapable of taking care of ourselves.

Both principles can help cure many marital problems. The happiest couples are not those living in the nicest house, possessing the newest and more expensive car, and taking the most expensive vacations. Divorce among the wealthy is rampant. Don’t be deceived. Love God! Love your mate but beware of the love of money! It can ruin it all! If you live with trust in God’s provision, you can jointly share in good works for the benefit of others, not thinking that such sacrifices will

somehow jeopardize your future. You can, at the same time, be financially prepared for life's uncertainties.

Live with an awareness of your own imperfections.

Jesus taught his disciples not to judge (Matt 7:1-2). These words have often been misinterpreted and misapplied. Contextually they refer to the tendency of people to condemn others while they sin more grievously themselves. It is captured in the essential description: "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt 7:3-5, NASB).



How valuable such a principle is in marriage! In the first place, how can we hope to bring out the best in our mates if we are self-righteous and constantly condemning? Our mates will be far more encouraged to do right by seeing your godly example than in getting a hypocritical lecture on how sorry they are! One of the fundamental motivations of forgiveness is the personal realization that we have faults and need forgiveness from our mate too. The person who is not honest with his own faults will likely be harsh and unforgiving with his/her mate.

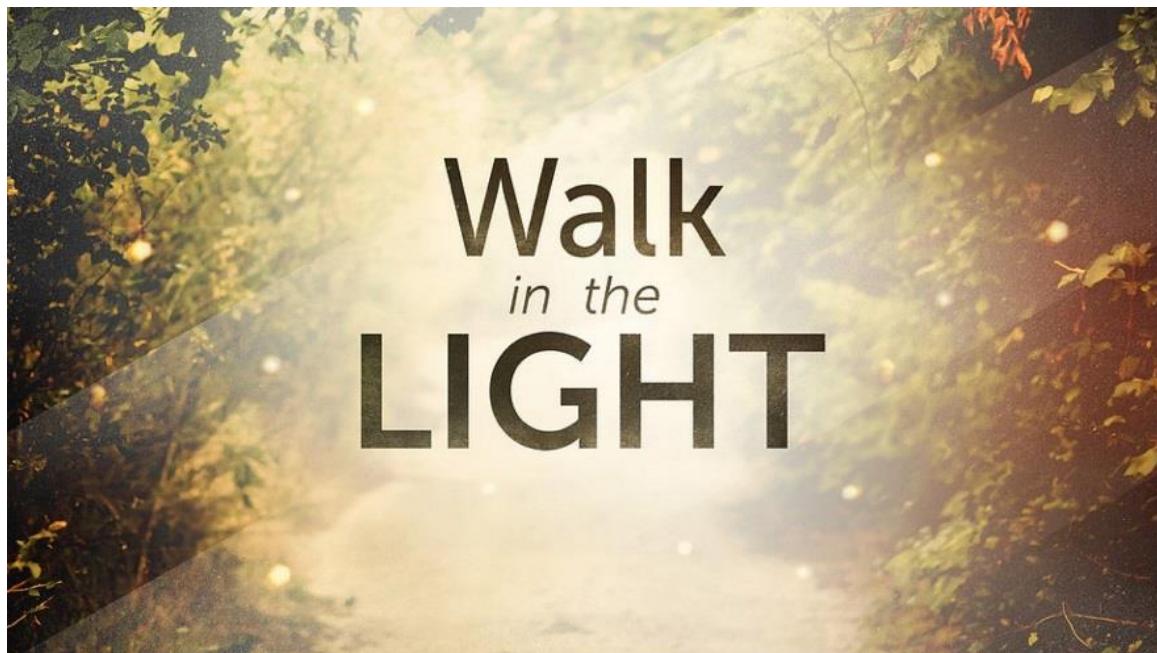
Practice daily the “golden rule.”

As Jesus summarized in a practical way what it means to “love your neighbor” or to give the essence of God’s OT revelation, he put it in the simplest of terms: “Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12, NASB).

Practice the golden rule every day. Assess your actions by it. What if my mate treated me like I treat them? Before you say something, ask yourself, “How would I like to be spoken to like that?” Before you act, ask yourself, “Would I want to be treated that way?” I’ve often heard the aged who have been successfully married for many years appeal to this simple rule, “Treat your mate like you would want to be treated.”

Conclusion

The real key to a happy marriage is a righteous marriage – or more properly, the union and interaction of two righteous people who want to please God. When we create a culture of righteousness in our homes, we prepare the way for a true dream home! The wife should follow God's blueprint for her role and let both husband and wife seek to decorate their homes with the beautiful furnishing of righteousness. Your home will be a thing of amazing beauty as you walk in the light in your marriage.



Light Lesson 19 Questions

Walking in the Light: Marriage

Building Your Dream Home (Part 2)

1. What does Ephesians 5:22-25 teach us about the relationship of Christ to the church? Husband to a wife?
2. God envisions a wife who will...? (Give three answers.)
3. A marriage walking in the light will decorate the home with what “beautiful furnishings”? What does anger do to those “beautiful furnishings”?
4. How do we protect our marriage by keeping our desire for our spouse?
5. When we say “God does not really mean ‘till death do us part’ ” because “He would not want me to live unhappily,” what are we really saying to God?
6. How do we communicate with transparency and honesty with our spouse? What are the barriers to this?
7. Why is generosity more important than equality in a marriage?
8. Why is it important to show love when your spouse is least deserving of it? Does your spouse need a different love language than you?
9. Why do we serve our mate to glorify God?
10. What are some of the dangers of finances in marriage?
11. Why is it important to recognize our own imperfections in our marriage?
12. How do we practice the golden rule in our marriage?

Light Lesson 20

Walking in the Light: Marriage

Building Your Dream Home (Part 3)

by Johnny Felker

Introduction

Ephesians 5:8 teaches us, who in the past were in darkness, to walk as children of light. We want to walk as children of light in our marriages, knowing God will bless us in our obedience. In thinking about marriages, the eyes of our heart allow us to envision what God wants us to practice in our marriages.

So often, it is the case that couples put far more thought into building their dream “house” than they do in building the dream “home.” If we want to build a dream home, we must do the same things we would do in building a dream house. In our first two lessons we learned we must:

- Consult the Architect;
- Lay a Solid Foundation;
- Follow the Architect’s Blueprint for the Husband of Her Dreams;
- Follow the Architect’s Blueprint for the Wife of His Dreams; and
- Decorate with the Beautiful Furnishings of Righteousness.

In addition to these things, we must also “implement great home maintenance!”

The key to great home maintenance is understanding the needs of our mates. Peter urged men to live with their wives according to knowledge or in an understanding way:

“You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet 3:7).

It is our job as husbands (and wives) to be educated on what our spouses need from us and seek to provide those needs. It is the essence of marital love to do so. Let’s explore somethings we need to understand or know. We need to understand:

Our Mates Personal Values

We all come into marriage with a set of values that were cultivated in our first homes and then maybe reshaped in our adult lives. A good question for couples to ask themselves is, “What are my mate’s core values?”

Exploring our mate’s core value is important because couples sometimes act out of different value systems. Some of their conflicts are due to not understanding how the other might look at a decision or a situation.

For example, two people contemplate a purchase: One looks at the purchase through the values of accountability or frugality. They may say, “I won’t buy what I can’t pay for right now or can’t afford due to other obligations.” Another looks at the purchase through the value of philanthropy or generosity. Thoughts of accountability and affordability give way to the desire to help or bring joy to another regardless of the cost.

And so, the couple may have a conflict because their value systems conflict. Who is right? Your wife...of course! What is ultimately important is that we respect the value systems of our mates.

Our Mate’s Personality Characteristics

The traditional way of thinking about personality involved four temperaments and their combinations (the melancholy, the choleric, the sanguine, and the phlegmatic). Others have provided more detailed or refined listings of personality types like the sixteen personality profiles of the Meyer-Briggs Type Indicator.

We sometimes expect our mates to think and act like we do! Yet they are not our clone. Their personality is different, and we need to know why they act the way they do. We learn that when they respond differently, it does not indicate they are intending to be offensive.

Our Mate’s “Love Language”

Several years ago, Gary Chapman popularized the concept of the five love languages. He had observed through his counseling work that couples had differing ways of showing and perceiving emotional love. He suggested that each person has a primary and secondary “love language.” In other words, people may define and express emotional love in different ways. Here is his list:

- Giving gifts
- Spending quality time
- Speaking words of affirmation
- Engaging in acts of service (devotion)
- Physical touching

Chapman's point was that people often show love in the way they prefer to receive it; however, it may not match the preferences of the one to whom they are showing love. So, he suggests that each person in a relationship should learn which ways their mate would feel most loved and concentrate on offering those kinds of experiences.

Do you know which “love language” is most meaningful to your mate?

Our Mate’s Preferred Needs as a Male or Female

Several works have sought to give information about the unique emotional makeup of the two sexes. Many years ago, Willard Harley, Jr. wrote a popular book titled “*His needs, Her needs.*” Harley identified and discussed five things husbands need:

- Sexual fulfillment
- Recreational companionship
- An attractive spouse
- Domestic support
- Admiration

The list for the wives’ unique needs was different.

- Affection
- Conversation
- Honesty and openness
- Financial support
- Family commitment

John Gray would later seek to convince us that “*Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.*” Again, he sought to delineate some of the unique features of the sexes and how they relate to one another.

Though our mate may or may not conform to these stereotypical portraits, these suggestions may provide a starting point for good conversations that will help us understand one another. As husbands, we need to ask, “What are the primary needs of my wife that I need to fulfill?” And the wife should ask the same about her husband.

All of these resources can be helpful to some degree in gaining knowledge or understanding, but none of them will do any good unless we “tune in” to our mate. Observe and pay attention! Ask questions and listen! Make adjustments when you hear expressions of dissatisfaction or neglect or expressions of appreciation and happiness.

One of the ironies of marriage is that we work so hard to know the person we want to marry and to do the things that win them but then often neglect to continue to do those things after marriage. It would be short-sighted to buy a dream house and never do what is needed to maintain and repair it. How much more so for our dream homes! It is one of our most significant investments! I hope you take seriously the need to implement great home maintenance.

Inspect Regularly for “Termites”!

Anybody who owns a house may have had that disheartening feeling when you recognize termites have undermined the beautiful exterior. And while everything looks great on the outside, underneath termites have been eating away at the structure. These pests can systematically pulverize the two by fours in your walls. And if unchecked, they can cause your house to collapse. Termites are appropriately called the “silent killers” of your house because when undetected, they can cause major damage.

In the same way, if we want our dream home to stay strong, we need to regularly inspect for those silent marriage wreckers that can almost unobtrusively dismantle our marriage. But first, let’s think about what can happen when these termites are not detected and eradicated.

Seven Stages of “Termite” Infestation

Authors Gary and Barbara Rosberg describe the stages of a wrecked dream home in their book *“Divorce-Proof Your Marriage.”*



Disappointment

It is the realization the person who you thought was the perfect mate turns out to be not so perfect, rather human actually. It's the end of the honeymoon period, and reality sets in.

In this first stage, you deal with unmet needs, irritating habits, unanticipated offenses and hurts, and conflicting personalities and values. Disappointment is the first sign that there are problems that need to be overcome, or worse things may develop.

Discouragement

Next comes the feeling of sadness or frustration when problems aren't being solved. She starts complaining; he gets quiet. And then, there is the thought that the problems can't be resolved.

Distance

At this point, the couple starts focusing on other things—careers, hobbies, projects, etc. The focus shifts from seeking to please each other to becoming more interested in something else. The couple is growing apart, and communication has broken down.

Disconnection

Now there is a shift in attitude. They once felt hurt because they cared about one another and the relationship. But now, care and concern are abandoned. Why bother? Intimacy is rare.

Discord

By this stage, anger and frustration come to the surface. It becomes easier to criticize and argue; you don't feel you have much to lose. Things can become hostile as each digs in for conflict and marital warfare.

Emotional divorce

At this stage, one or more of the partners has decided it is over. Emotionally they have already ended the relationship, and it may never go further than this. Maybe there is the embarrassment of failure, the desire to avoid disappointing parents or children who would not approve of divorce. And so, everything has happened except the legal separation of the two.

Legal divorce

Finally, one or more of the partners decides to end it. Surely no one who hears this description wants this to happen. And, it is not inevitable that it happens. You can reverse course and repair the damage already done; your dream home can become good as new.

Do you see signs of termite damage? I hope not! But if so, these are the warnings signs when looking for the source of the damage. It is important we ask, “What are those termites?”

Four Marital “Termites”

Consider four things that can almost silently eat away the foundations of a good marriage.

Inattention

The problem with termites is they don’t make any noise. They are silent destroyers; so is inattention. A husband or wife can be oblivious to their partner’s unhappiness. They assume they will always “be there” for them; or that they have the power with a few moments of attention to draw them back into the relationship.



Inattention usually means our focus is somewhere else, and there are obviously many things that can vie for our attention. These often include the following: work, friends, other family members (children), and hobbies.

In contrast, Paul shows that marriage demands paying attention to the needs of our spouse: “but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife...but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband” (1 Cor 7:33–34).

Selfishness

Selfishness is probably at the root of all sin, but it is especially problematic in marriage. If we approach a relationship selfishly, we’ll only be concerned about what we want from the relationship.

Marriage cannot succeed with two people selfishly seeking what they want. Instead, it must be a relationship of mutual giving. Paul taught the mutual self-giving nature of marriage. To the men, he said, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church” (Eph 5:29). Likewise, to the women, he said: “that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored” (Titus 2:4–5).

These commands require a selfless serving mentality. “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself” (Phil 2:3).

Unforgiveness

When two people live as close as a husband and wife, there are going to be times of neglect or mistreatment. It is during this time our love is tested. So, do we have a love that forgives and forgets? Or do we hold grudges and become bitter? Do we accumulate wrongs? Paul warned the husbands: “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them” (Col 3:19).



Surely the teaching of the Lord applies to marriage as much as in any relationship: “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt 6:14–15).

Instead, we need to live out Paul’s exhortation: “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph 4:32).

Disloyalty

Marriage requires an exclusive loyalty of a man and woman to one another. “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

Both partners must have an absolute commitment to the unity of their relationship, avoiding any effort to build a “marriage-like” relationship with another person. By focusing on another man or another woman, we erode our interest in the person on whom we should be focusing. We may have compared one person with another as a prospective mate, but that must now come to an end. Do not allow yourself to imagine what life would have been like with someone else.



When a man begins to focus on another woman or a woman begins to focus on another man, their loyalty to one another is eroded, and the other’s security and trust is undermined. That is why couples must keep proper boundaries with close associates.

One especially pernicious form of disloyalty is pornography. In it, a man or woman substitutes the proper desire and attraction for their mate to someone else. We should reflect soberly on the words of Jesus. “But I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt 5:28).

Conclusion

All these things are marital termites that can silently wreck our homes. A person would be foolish indeed not to be on the alert for the things that would undermine the foundations and structure of their houses. And the same could be said about those who ignore the reality of “termites” in their relationship.

Instead, let’s do inspections regularly. Stay attentive! Continue to do the things that you once did to win your partner’s love. Approach your marriage with a servant’s heart thinking, “How can I make the life of my mate better?” Deal with the things that make you angry and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Do not allow another person to distract you from the loyal love your mate deserves. When we implement these principles, we can preserve our dream homes!

Finally, let me include an important note about this discussion. Probably all of us as preachers have used the material of others from time to time in our work and often without citing our sources. We may have used the ideas of an excellent article as the outline for a sermon or used an excellent sermon outline we have

heard from another in our own work without revealing the source. In academic circles this would be greatly frowned upon; but among brethren, it has been generally understood and humorously stated that “The art of being original is forgetting where you got it.”

Though making personal contributions from my repertory of lessons and research in this series, I have used quite freely at times the work of my preacher friends Jeff May and Steve Kline whose excellent book stimulated my interest in developing my own series on this topic. With their permission, I used the title of their book for my three lessons in this series (Light Lessons 18, 19, and 20), “Walking in the Light: How to Build Your Dream Home.” I am grateful to them for their work; and I highly recommend that you purchase their book as a resource for your study, teaching, and work with families. It is an excellent work, and I am grateful for their permission to use their title and material in my lesson.



Light Lesson 20

Walking in the Light: Marriage

Building Your Dream Home (Part 3)

1. Why is it important to consider our spouse's personal values and personality characteristics?
 2. Why is it important to consider our mate's love language?
 3. Why is it important to discuss our mate's preferred needs with them?
 4. What are the seven stages of "termite" infestation on a house (marriage)?
 5. What are four common marital "termites" in a home? How do I combat these?

Light Lesson 21

Walking in the Light as a Family of Faith

by Matthew Allen

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

1 John 1:7; 2:1, 5-6 (ESV)

If there were ever a collection of verses to post on the family refrigerator, this would be it. For in them, lies our daily mission. We have been called upon to walk in the same way in which He (Jesus) walked. Every day every member of your family walks out the door into a world in open rebellion against God. The challenges we face are growing, affecting preteens, adolescents, college-bound, and adults young and old. It is not the same world it was thirty years ago. The problems of the 21st century are more dynamic, coming at our families from every possible angle. The pressure to conform is intense.

While the basics of sin remain unchanged, the shiny packaging Satan uses has an appeal that can appear enlightened, tolerant, and compassionate. More than ever, the spiritual leader of each family must take the initiative to intentionally set the direction for the family. Direction determines destination.

Four Things 1 John 1:7-2:6 Teaches Us about the Direction Our Family Should Take

We must walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

This active tense verb carries along the sense of living or behaving in a customary manner.²² The word is used throughout the New Testament as a metaphor for personal conduct in daily life. Paul enjoyed using this term when he

²² Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

wrote to the first century churches. Ephesians 2:10; 4:1; 5:2, 8; Colossians 1:10; 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; and 4:1 are just a few examples.

We walk, not in order to be justified, but *because* we were justified (declared “not guilty”) when our sins were obliterated at the cross (Col 2:11-14). We were given a new identity as a son or daughter of God. Walking is the product of our *sanctification*, where daily we participate with God in the process of becoming more and more like God himself. As each day goes by, our general pattern of behavior should increasingly reflect our new identity. For example, John calls upon us to:

- 1 John 2:17 - “(do) the will of God.”
- 1 John 3:22 - “do what pleases Him.”
- 1 John 2:29, HSCB - “(do) what is right;” “(practice) righteousness,” ESV.

We must follow the example of Jesus (1 John 2:6). Also see John 6:38; 8:29; 10:17-18; 14:31.

The expectation is to move forward with decreasing frequency of sin in our life (1 John 2:1a).

Rather than settle for or become content with the sin that plagues our life, we are to resist it, relying on the strength of the Lord (Eph 6:10) and the direction of His Spirit (Rom 8:9-14).

When we do sin, we have an advocate, who is the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 2:2b).

Jesus’ work for us did not stop at the cross. He continues to provide us forgiveness from sin while we walk in the light. When we get off track, we must acknowledge it (1 John 1:9a), trust in His promise to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b), and change our direction back to where it should be.



Three Ways Your Family Can Walk in the Right Direction

Make time each day for the word of God.

Paul references the *word of Christ* in Colossians 3:16. He instructs Christians to allow it to “dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.” All of the virtues mentioned in 3:12-15 naturally come out of the mind that is dominated by Scripture. Be sure to take a moment to read these verses. These are all desired qualities for relationships in family life. They are produced from the heart that allows Scripture to dwell within. *Dwell*, in Colossians 3:16, means to “in habit or live in.” Metaphorically, it means “to be at home in.”²³



So, the application is for us to allow God’s word to be at home in our heart. In addition to this, Paul says the word is to dwell in us *richly*, which means “with abundance.” In one Greek dictionary, the word “opulent” is used to define what Paul means by richly. The word of God is to grow within us to the point to where it impacts every aspect of our life, ruling over every thought, word, and action. This is what it means to be directed by the Spirit. This does not happen passively. Paul says it comes through *teaching* and *admonishing*. Teaching is the sharing of positive truth. It involves the impartation of skills or training. “Admonishing” is the negative side where a person is warned or counseled in regard to their behavior.

The directives are clear. The expectation has been set. How is your family doing? Sadly, many families today would fail the test. A superficial understanding of biblical precepts and expectations is a growing problem and is especially worrisome for the younger generations living at home. At no time before in history has a generation been more bombarded by information - much of it worthless and immoral. While still impactful in a negative way, television remains a virtual sewer, spewing its content into our living rooms and bedrooms. But television is being quickly supplanted by our smartphones and tablets. If you added up your screen time each week, how many hours are you spending on social media, YouTube, and Netflix? The answer might surprise you. If we are going to

²³ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick. *A Greek -English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

commit to Paul's directive, we must severely curtail that which has no spiritual value.

There really is no excuse anymore. In our digitally saturated world, spiritual resources are available at every turn. Many local congregations provide a daily Bible reading in an email every morning. Preachers around the country write daily devotional blogs that are sent out via email and posted online. Our smartphones allow us to run Bible apps that will set reminders for daily Bible reading, provide devotionals, and provide opportunities for personal Bible study.

It is the responsibility of the spiritual leader in each home to set the example, as well as, lay down some expectations for the family to spend time together in prayer, meditation, and reading Scripture. Meaningful change is often accomplished by small incremental steps. Ten to fifteen minutes per day could make an eternal difference for your family.

Make the commitment to be consistent.

As biblical knowledge is acquired, it must be lived out. Referencing again Colossians 3:16, Paul mentions teaching and admonishing. We're living in a time where accountability seems to be resisted. But it is obvious from this passage, and a wide range of other New Testament texts, it is not so much about what we profess, it is about the follow-through. James stressed this in the last section of the first chapter of his epistle:

- James 1:22 – “*be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*”
- James 1:25 – “*the doer who acts, ...will be blessed in his doing.*”
- James 1:27 – “*religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*”

In the late first century writing, The Didache, the church fathers exhorted readers, “Thy word shall not be false or empty, but fulfilled by action.”²⁴

Consistency begins with the spiritual leader and goes from there. The principles laid down in Titus 2:1-2 are fitting. Parents and grandparents should live in sobriety, dignity, exhibit self-control, hold to the truth, and move with love and



²⁴ Lightfoot, Joseph Barber, and J. R. Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1891

steadfastness. Paul writes, “*show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned... in everything ...adorn the doctrine of God our Savior*” (Titus 2:7-8a, 10). One scholar noted that consistency “means more than ‘practicing what we preach.’ It means living in conformity with truth and light, living in accord with the character of God. Those whose allegiance is true to God will be shaped by that commitment and by God’s own character.”²⁵

Consistency continues with the actual hands-on spiritual training of those who live inside the home. Paul wrote, “*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*” (Eph 6:4). Children need to be held to a standard of accountability inside an atmosphere of love, grace, and encouragement.

Make the decision to be together.

Some of the most painful words any father could hear are, “you were never home.” While words like these are often spoken in times of emotional distress and are subject to hyperbole, is there an element of truth contained therein? Time is the most precious commodity in the world. It is indispensable and plays a role in every activity. Ben Franklin once said, “Time is the stuff of which life is made.” The moment you have right now is by the grace of God. “*We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again*” (2 Sam 14:14a). We cannot create a moment, borrow a moment, or destroy a moment. We can only make wise or unwise use of it.



Someone has rightly said we live in deeds, not years, in thoughts, not breaths, and in feelings, not figures on a dial. The Psalmist said, “*Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom*” (Psa 90:12). Earlier in the same book, David wrote, “*O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before*

²⁵ Thompson, Marianne Meye. *1–3 John*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992

you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather” (Psa 39:4-6).

The moments go by ... fast. Young parents have a hard time imagining times beyond changing diapers, spilled sippy cups, and sleepless nights. The teenage years seem so far away, and high school graduation looks far down the road. It is during these years careers are being built, the family expands, homes get enlarged, and material possessions mount. Someone must work to pay for all the stuff. What is often sacrificed is time at home. Children are left to raise themselves. The church is expected to provide the spiritual direction through Bible classes and youth activities. And before you know it, parents are sitting on the other side wondering where all the time went.

No matter where you are in the process of raising a family, now is the time to make time to be together. There will be other things where we will have to say “no” and choose what is important over the urgent. Time together does not have to always be something extravagant, a production, or an adventure. It could be something as simple as eating together or designating a night at home for everyone to relax. A young person’s spiritual life can receive great stimulation from the smallest moments of real life, where they see the parents living out their spiritual life with conviction and grace.

Conclusion

There is nothing profound in this lesson. Probably, for you, there is nothing new. You have most likely heard all of these things before. Living by the direction of the word of God. Striving to be consistent. Spending time together. It all sounds so simple in theory, but when life comes at us, these things can become the first things we sacrifice. May we understand; we do so at our peril. Walking in the light was never intended to become a part-time pursuit, but the defining characteristic of your and your family’s life. What are some things you can do today to either get back on track or keep going in your spiritual pursuit?

Light Lesson 21 Questions

Walking in the Light as a Family of Faith

1. What are some of the challenges families face in today's culture? Be prepared to discuss.
2. How have the dynamics of the problems we face shifted over the last thirty years?
3. What does it mean to walk in the light?
4. How did Jesus set the example of walking in the light?
5. Who is our advocate when we sin, and what does that mean to you?
6. What does "dwell" mean in Colossians 3:16?
7. What effect will be seen when we allow the word to dwell within us *richly*?
8. Why is consistency so important to raising a family? What are some things you can do to improve in spiritual consistency?
9. What are some things dominating your time right now? Where does the spiritual fit in?
10. What are some things you can do to improve your spiritual pursuit?

Light Lesson 22

Walking in the Light: Building a Spiritually Significant Life

by Greg Gwin

Introduction

“What is your life?” James asked that question by inspiration (James 4:14). His answer was: “It is even a vapor, that appeared for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” This statement is a stark reality for us all, and it should affect the choices we make and the way we spend our sojourn here.



The Folly of Living for This World

Solomon was very possibly the richest man to ever live in history. If we could equate his fortunes to modern equivalence, it's likely he would make men such as Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, or Warren Buffet look like relative paupers. 2 Chronicles 1:15 says that he “made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones.” Imagine that! Precious metal as common as roadside gravel! Yet for all his wealth, Solomon found his fortunes were “vexation” and “vanity.”

One of Solomon's great discouragements resulted from knowing **he would leave all of his wealth behind**. “Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity (Eccl 2:18-19). For all today who pursue money and the things it will buy, remember this: you will leave it all behind. Paul said: “we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Tim 6:7).

Solomon was also vexed by the thought that **he would die and be forgotten**. “For the living know that they shall die...neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun” (Eccl 9:5-6).



If you think this won’t happen to you, try this simple exercise: without any research into the matter, write down the full names of your great-grandparents. You have eight of them. Do you even know their names? Probably not, much less any knowledge of their lives and the things that were important to them. Now, look forward. There’s a high probability your grandchildren’s children won’t even know YOUR name! You are going to die and be forgotten. Therefore, it is completely illogical to place your top priorities on the passing things of this world.

Building a Spiritually Significant Life

To build a life with enduring significance, we clearly need to **avoid materialism**. Jesus said: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). To do otherwise is to open ourselves up to “many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Tim 6:9). Learn to be “content with what you have” (Heb 13:5).



Solomon, as mentioned above, despite his wealth and success, was a truly vexed man. However, in the final analysis, he got it right. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl 12:13). Surely, we need to do this. **Fearing God and humbly obeying His will is vital** to the ‘spiritually significant life’ we want to live.

Of course, this eternally worthwhile life will require that we **get our priorities in order**. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33). The things of this world are temporary, but the things of God will endure forever (1 John 2:15-17). Since this is the case, our decisions should be made accordingly.

Try this test: offer a toddler a shiny coin in one hand and a crumbled-up bill in the other. The child will go for the bright coin. Sadly, we are often just as immature in prioritizing the temporal things of this world instead of the eternal values of Heaven.

All of this, of course, requires **trusting God and His way** rather than our own human wisdom or the philosophies of men. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Prov 3:5-6)

Paul as an Example of a Spiritually Significant Life

Someone asked about the estate of a rich man who had recently died. “How much did he leave behind?” The answer was: “He left it all.”

What about Paul? What did he leave behind? First, **he apparently did not leave behind much material wealth**. Although he had “profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation” (Gal 1:14), he gave that all up when he became a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil 3:7-9).

But **Paul did leave behind the worthy and enduring example of a life lived in dedicated service to the Lord**. He was always painfully mindful of his life before his conversion when he led the persecution against the early church



(Acts 8:3; 1 Tim 1:12-16). But his turn around was so complete he could urge others to “be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Paul’s legacy also included faithful brethren, converted and influenced by his life and teaching, **who were there to carry the banner of Christ after he was gone**. He encouraged Timothy to do the same. “And the 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).

In the end, Paul could confidently say: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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 4:6-8).

What about us? Will our lives be spiritually significant?

The question boils down quite simply to this: What will we leave behind? What will we send ahead? Things of this world will matter not at all in the end. Only a life of faithful service and a reward in Heaven will matter. Paul said it this way: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:17-18).



Light Lesson 22 Questions

Walking in the Light: Building a Spiritually Significant Life

1. What does James 4:14 teach us about this life?

2. What was Solomon's relationship with his wealth?

3. What did Paul say of our possessions in 1 Timothy 6:7?

4. Why is avoiding materialism important in building a spiritually significant life?

5. What is meant by "fear God" in Ecclesiastes 12:13?

6. Make a priority list. Does it match how you spend your time and energy?

7. How was Paul an example of a person who built a spiritually significant life?

Light Lesson 23

Visual Perception:

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

by David Padfield²⁶

Introduction

In the tenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus sent out His twelve apostles and “gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (Matt 10:1). This commission was limited in that they were not allowed to “go into the way of the Gentiles” or “enter a city of the Samaritans” (Matt 10:5). Instead, they were sent “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). Persecution would accompany their preaching (Matt 10:16–22). The opposition of the Pharisees would be like ravaging wolves. The disciples’ only hope would be to look to their Shepherd for protection. As an encouragement amidst this persecution, Jesus told them of His Father’s care for the righteous. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt 10:27–31).

The word *sparrow* (Gr. *strouthion*)²⁷ is the name given to several different species of birds in the Bible. They ate grain and insects and gathered in noisy flocks.

These tiny birds were such social creatures that a lone sparrow was the symbol of deep loneliness (Psa 102:7). Sparrows would often build their untidy nests in the eaves of houses but were not driven away when they built their nests in the Temple (Psa 84:3).



²⁶ Author notes some material borrowed from William Barclay.

²⁷ Photo source: Wikipedia

In the days of our Lord, sparrows sold for a very low price—you could buy two of them for one copper coin (Matt 10:29). “Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people’s food in the marketplace, the cheapest of all birds. Two were here purchased for an *assarion*, a small copper coin of little value (less than a sixteenth of a denarius, hence less than an hour’s wages)²⁸; Luke 12:6 seems to indicate they were even cheaper if purchased in larger quantities.”²⁹



Those who were poor and could not afford to sacrifice a sheep or a goat might bring a sparrow to the Temple (cf. Lev 14:1–7). So insignificant were these little birds that if you bought four of them the seller would

throw in one more for free (Luke 12:4–7). It was this extra sparrow of which Jesus said, “and not one of them is forgotten before God.” Can anything be weaker or less significant than a few birds worth maybe two copper coins? But look at God! He knows every one of the sparrows and cares for the daily fate of each one. God’s care for His creation is so great even this extra sparrow is noted and observed by Him!

Jesus brings out this point by telling us the hairs of our heads are all numbered. The importance of this does not lie in the actual count, but in the fact God cares enough about His people to know the smallest detail about them. He knows things they do not know about themselves. So, those who are of more value than many sparrows should face life without fear. The point our Lord was making is this: if God is concerned about the tiny sparrow and notes its fate, *how much greater* must His concern be for man, who is immeasurably greater in value than the sparrow!

God’s Eye Is on Things We Deem Insignificant

Sometimes it seems that God is the *only one* who cares for sparrows. Cats and hawks like to hunt and eat them, and little boys have been known to torment them. Adults complain about how they multiply and consider them pests. Yet, Jesus said, “not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Matt 10:29). If God’s providence is so all-embracing that not even a sparrow drops from the sky apart from the will of God, cannot that same God be trusted to

²⁸ Photo source: bible-history.com

²⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*

extend His providence over the disciples of Christ? It is interesting Jesus chose the most common of all birds to teach a profound truth: in God's eyes, no one is insignificant!

God not only provides food for "the birds of the air," but He also "clothes the grass of the field" (Matt 6:25–34). The "lilies of the field" (Matt 6:28) were the scarlet poppies. Even today, the red anemone (*anemone coronaria*) grows wild on the hillside above the Sea of Galilee. They bloomed one day on the hillsides of Palestine; and yet in their brief life they were clothed with a beauty that surpassed the beauty of the robes of kings. When they died they were used for nothing better than for burning. The point is this: the Palestinian oven was made of clay. It was like a clay box set on bricks over the fire. When it was desired to raise the temperature of it especially quickly, some handfuls of dried grasses and wild flowers were flung inside the oven and set alight. The flowers had but one day of life; and then they were set alight to help a woman to heat an oven when she was baking in a hurry; and yet God clothes them with a beauty which is beyond man's power to imitate. If God gives such beauty to a short-lived flower, how much more will He care for man? Surely the generosity that is lavished upon a flower for one day will not be forgetful of man, the crown of His creation.³⁰



David was impressed by God's care for us (Psa 8:1–9). When we look at the vast expanse of creation, we wonder how God could be concerned for people who constantly disappoint Him. The next time you question your worth as a person, remember God considers you highly valuable. We have great worth because we bear the stamp of the Creator.

God Does Not Always Prevent Evil from Happening to Us

The fact "not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will" (Matt 10:29) means sometimes bad things can happen. Even though God watches over the sparrows, this does not prevent them being hunted by predators. Even

³⁰ Photo source: fromthegrapevine.com

though God watches over every one of us, this does not mean our lives will be free from care.

God had placed a “hedge” around Job (Job 1:8–11). God allowed Satan to tempt Job (Job 1:12). In the midst of his trials, he did not lose his trust in God (Job 1:21). “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

We can be assured with every temptation we face there will also be a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13). “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” The temptations you will face are the common lot of all human beings. And God is not simply a spectator of the affairs of life—He is concerned and active. *But God is faithful!* — these words ought to be carved in gold letters on the memory and imagination of all Christians. Believers can count on His help. He will always make a way out. My brethren, there are no special cases! When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!

God’s Care Continues for Us

We may not hold the tiny sparrow in high esteem, but the Son of God used it to illustrate our heavenly Father’s watchful care: “you are of more value than *many* sparrows” (Matt 10:31). If God is concerned about the tiny sparrow, *how much greater* must His concern be for man, who is immeasurably greater in value than the sparrow!

There is no place for worry in the life of a sparrow, and no attempt to pile up goods for an unforeseeable future—yet their lives go on. The point Jesus is making is not that the birds do not work; it has been said no one works harder than the average sparrow to make a living; the point He is making is that they do not worry. You will never see a sparrow straining to see a future he cannot see or seeking to find security in the things he has accumulated for the future.

Worry is needless, useless and even injurious (Matt 6:25–32). Worry which wears out the mind also wears out the body. Worry affects a man’s judgment, lessens his powers of decision, and renders him progressively incapable of dealing with life. Worry is a manifestation of our lack of faith in God (Matt 6:30). We need to learn to be content (Phil 4:4–13).

In the midst of turbulent times Habakkuk said, “Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the

fields yield no food; though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls -- Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:17-18).

God's continued care for us should bring contentment in our lives. "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim 6:6-10).

Conclusion

In 1904 a songwriter, Mrs. Civilla Martin³¹, went to visit a bedridden friend in Elmira, New York. Mrs. Martin asked the woman if she ever got discouraged because of her physical condition. Her friend quickly responded: "Mrs. Martin, how can I be discouraged when my heavenly Father watches over each little sparrow and I know He loves and cares for me?" On her journey back home, Mrs. Martin completed the writing of her new text, which has since been a source of much encouragement to many of God's people.



From *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
why should my heart be lonely and long for Heaven and home,
when Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me...

"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,
and resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
though by the path He leadeth but one step I may see:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me...

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
when songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him; from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me...

Refrain: I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,

³¹ Photo source: hymns untoGod.com

for His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

God's care for us is immeasurable – He allowed His only begotten Son to die in our stead (John 3:16). When we consider the “riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering” this ought to soften our heart, “knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom 2:3-4).

God's care for us will sustain us throughout life, for “we know all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

God's care for us extends beyond the grave and into that home of the soul, for those who "do His commandments" have the right to the tree of life, and “may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev 22:14).



Light Lesson 23 Questions

Visual Perception: His Eye Is on the Sparrow

1. In Matthew 10, what does one learn about what God is observing?

2. Does this mean that God will not let evil happen to us?

3. What is God's attitude toward His children's care?

4. What should be the child of light's attitude in times of trial and temptation?

5. What application should one take away from this lesson?

Light Lesson 24

Visual Perception:

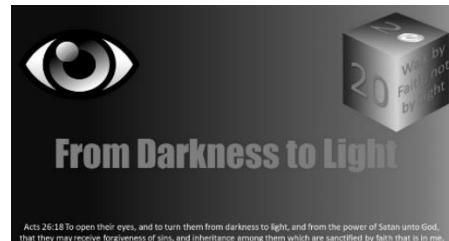
What the Blind Man Saw

by Eric Krieg

Through this series, we have often quoted Acts 26:18, among others, borrowing the phrase “from darkness to Light.” Saul of Tarsus was a fierce enemy of Christ and Christians at one time. We meet Saul in Acts 7:58. Whenever Stephen was being stoned to death for preaching the gospel of Christ, “the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Later, this man said that when Stephen’s blood was being shed, “I stood there giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed him” (Acts 22:20). (Text will quote Christians Standard Bible (2017) unless otherwise specified).

After this, Acts 8:1 goes on to say that on “that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered through the land of Judea and Samaria.” Verse 3 says that Saul “was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.” Saul was trying to eliminate Christianity to the best of his ability.

Listen to what he said of his attempts later in his life, in Acts 26:9-11. “In fact, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I actually did this in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I was in agreement against them. In all the synagogues I often punished them and tried to make them blaspheme. Since I was terribly enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.”



This is what Saul was trying to do when we begin reading about him in Acts 9. Verses 1 and 2 say, “Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”

What happens next is truly an amazing set of circumstances. Acts 9:3-19 records this man's conversion to Jesus Christ. And, you should note that his conversion is also described in Acts 22:6-21 and Acts 26:12-23. You need to read all three accounts to get the full picture of Saul's conversion (whose name was later changed to Paul). To introduce the account, we will just be reading from Acts 9:3-19.

"As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul said. 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting,' he replied. 'But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'



"The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

"There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' 'Here I am, Lord,' he replied. 'Get up and go to the street called Straight,' the Lord said to him, 'to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so that he may regain his sight.' 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.' "Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on him and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' At once something like scales fell



from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. And after taking some food, he regained his strength.”

The purpose of this lesson is to consider some things Saul saw while he was blind. For, even though he was unable to see physically, he saw some things very plainly for the first time. And, what he saw while he was blind made a great difference in his life, as he completely gave his life over to Jesus Christ! Then, as you consider what this blind man saw, you must evaluate if you have seen the same things so as to allow Jesus Christ to rule your life!

He Saw Jesus as the Messiah

Saul saw Jesus as the Messiah. This is the fundamental truth all Christianity hinges on. Either Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) sent from God as His very Son in fulfillment of all the prophecies made concerning Him in the Old Testament, or He is not.

He saw he had rejected the Messiah

Whenever Saul was traveling on the road to Damascus with the intention of persecuting Christians, he really did believe Christianity was false. This means that Saul had heard of Jesus Christ and reached the conclusion that Jesus was not actually the Messiah (Promised One). Later in his life (after his conversion), Paul (after his name was changed) said, “I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, appointing me to the ministry – even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I received mercy because I acted out of ignorance in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 1:12-14).

Everything he did as a persecutor of the Christian faith was done “out of ignorance in unbelief.” Saul was clearly among the large number of Jewish people who rejected Jesus Christ. Now, it is not known whether Saul ever met Jesus prior to His crucifixion. There is no clear indication in the Scriptures as to whether Saul had seen Jesus perform any of His many miracles or heard any of Jesus’ many teachings. Perhaps he had and rejected Jesus as many other Jews had done. Or, perhaps Saul had only heard about Jesus and was convinced that Jesus was an imposter of the Messiah God had promised.

Regardless, Saul became convinced Jesus is the Messiah on the road to Damascus. Saul heard Jesus’ voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you

persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). Saul was fighting a losing battle against Jesus in persecuting Him. Just like an ox that would kick against the goad a farmer would use to prod the animal in the right direction and inflict more pain on itself, Saul was harming himself by continuing to reject Jesus as the Messiah!



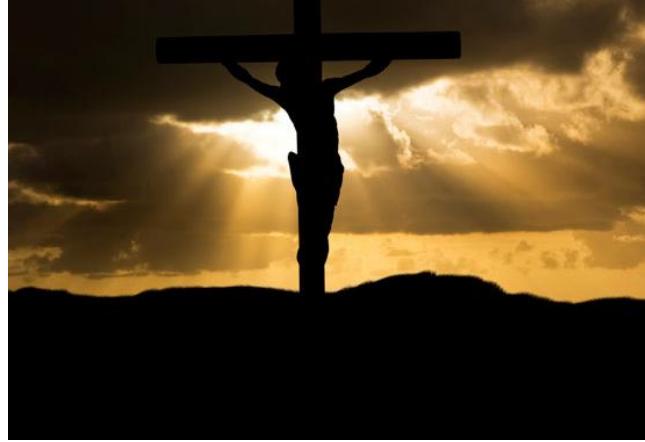
Just imagine how Saul’s heart must have sunk when he heard Jesus’ words that came next. When Saul asked who was speaking to him, Jesus replied, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting” (Acts 22:8). Can’t you imagine Saul thinking, “But I thought you were dead! The Jewish people had you crucified and your body was put into the tomb. I thought your body had been stolen from the tomb by your followers like the Jewish priests and elders said.” (See Matt 28:11-15.) Yet, no matter what Saul had believed or been told, Saul saw there was simply no denying the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was alive and well – just as those Christians he had been persecuting had said!

Today, no matter what you have believed or been told, you must see Jesus as the Messiah. The evidence is overwhelming! You must simply examine it with honest and unbiased eyes. You must see the evidence of the great miracles Jesus performed that demonstrated Him to be the Son of God. You must see the hundreds of prophecies made in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah that have all been fulfilled in Jesus, even though they were made hundreds of years before Jesus came to this earth. And, ultimately, you must see the empty tomb and recognize that Jesus really did raise from the dead. If none of these things had actually happened, there would have been no reason for many of those early Christians to suffer during their lives and allow themselves to be put to death. They could have merely renounced Jesus Christ. Yet, they did not renounce Him because they knew He is the Messiah!

He saw Jesus as the Savior

Jesus did not just come to this earth to convince people that He is the Son of God. Instead, there were great promises made in connection with the Messiah in the Old Testament prophecies. For example, God promised Abraham that “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). This is a promise that concerns Jesus Christ – as the Messiah would bring the opportunity of great spiritual blessings to everyone!

Jesus said that He came to “seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). That is, Jesus came to do what no one else had ever been able to accomplish. This is to provide the only sacrifice capable of removing sin. So, Jesus gave Himself to be put to death on the cross so people could have the forgiveness of their sins (Matt 26:26-29). For, no other sacrifice could actually remove sin – not even the blood of bulls and goats the Jews sacrificed (Heb 10:4).



When Saul saw Jesus as the Messiah, then, he also began to see Jesus as the Savior. 1 Timothy 1:15 records Paul later saying, “This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’” In fact, Saul recognized the same thing the apostle Peter had declared earlier, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Today, having embraced the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, you must see Jesus as the Savior of this world. Recognize that Jesus Christ left all the joys and comforts of Heaven to come to this earth, endure mistreatment, experience ridicule, be beaten and severely flogged, and then nailed to the cross to die. Although He did not have to come and go through any of this for Himself, He endured all the pain, humiliation, and suffering to save sinners! Now, through Jesus Christ, people can be saved from the eternal fires of Hell sinners deserve to experience. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” There simply is no other Savior besides Jesus!

He saw his opportunity to be saved

The truth that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of the world was not just a nice fact Saul now recognized. Instead, Saul saw this meant he could now be saved through Jesus! After Jesus identified Himself to Saul, Saul asked, “What should I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10).

Saul could have had many responses to seeing the truth that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior. He could have continued in his rebellion against Jesus to

continue advancing in Judaism. He could have been afraid of embracing Jesus because of persecution. He could have been so guilt-ridden over having persecuted Jesus that he never thought he could be forgiven.

However, Saul's question, "What should I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10) indicates that Saul saw his opportunity to be saved. He saw his personal need for Jesus to save Him. He saw that Jesus was greater than any sin he had committed. He saw an opportunity to be forgiven of all his sin. He saw there was an opportunity to overcome his sin through Jesus.

Today, you need to see that Jesus Christ gives you the opportunity to be saved. Yes, He died for the sins of all people. But this also includes you (and me)! Just as Saul saw his opportunity to be saved even though he persecuted the church and tried to destroy it in opposition to Jesus Christ (Gal 1:13), you can also be saved through Jesus! Never think that you have done so much wrong that Jesus cannot save you. For, Paul later called himself the "worst" of sinners (1 Tim 1:15) and said that he "received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life" (1 Tim 1:16). So, the great opportunity Jesus provides is that you can be saved through Him – no matter what sins you have committed in your life! They can all be forgiven through the blood He has shed!



He Saw He Had Been Wrong

Everything Saul saw about Jesus would not have meant anything if Saul did not also see that he had been wrong. Many people have recognized the evidence for Jesus as the Messiah and Savior but will refuse to admit they have been wrong. If Saul had been blinded to the reality of his life, he would never have followed Jesus.

He saw he was a sinner

Before Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was convinced that he was living right. In fact, the Scriptures indicate that Saul had been very careful to live according to what he believed was right and avoid sin. For example, Acts 26:9 records Paul saying that he was “convinced that it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Philippians 3:6 even records Paul making the statement that concerning “the righteousness that is in the law” he had been “blameless.”

Although Saul had certainly not kept all the Old Testament law perfectly, he was diligently striving to keep the law. As a Pharisaic Jew, this meant that he had tried to follow the Old Testament law in the strictest sense (Phil 3:5; Acts 22:5). So, when Saul began traveling that road to Damascus, he did not see himself as someone who was living in sin.



Yet, all that changed when Saul met Jesus. Suddenly, Saul saw what he had been doing in a different light. Now, Saul saw he had been rejecting the Son of God and persecuting those who believed and obeyed the truth. Just imagine the thoughts that must have been running through Saul’s mind during those three days he was blind and realized he was a sinner!

Not only did Saul see himself as a sinner, but 1 Timothy 1:15, again, said that he saw himself as the “worst” of sinners. He knew the terrible things he had done. Although he had once believed them to be right and pleasing to God, he now recognized they were not. He was able to humble himself to see himself as a sinner in need of Jesus Christ for salvation.

Today, you need to humbly accept the truth that you have sinned against God. No matter how much you may have wanted to do what is right and thought you have done right, you have sinned. Romans 3:23 states that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Yet, you must make this personal. Think back over all the things you have thought, said, and done. Recognize that you have failed to live your life in full compliance with the will of God. And, even though you likely have not done the same things Saul did in persecuting the church, you must see all sin as being equal in God’s sight and as making you equally deserving of eternity in Hell!

He saw that being religious is not enough

Saul was a devoutly religious person whenever he was traveling to Damascus. Jesus did not make him religious. In Acts 22:3-5, listen to what Paul said about himself prior to becoming a Christian. “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, arresting and putting both men and women in jail, as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. After I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to arrest those who were there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished.”

Now, think about how Saul could have responded when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (if he was like many people are today). He could have said, “Whether I believe in You is a personal matter. All that matters is that I am religious and practice my religion in the way I believe is right.” He could have said, “If you really are a loving Savior, you will love me for how I choose to practice my religion.”

However, Saul saw it is possible to be religious (and even devoutly so) and still be wrong. Saul recognized that there was no comfort to be found in how he had practiced his religion. His religion was not pleasing to God just because he had believed in God and did what he thought was right. Instead, Saul saw that his religion was wrong – because it went against the truth God had revealed! So, Saul did what Jesus instructed him to do to be saved.

Today, you must see that being religious is not enough. There are many different kinds of religion being practiced throughout this world, yet the Bible teaches it is possible to practice a useless religion if it fails to obey God (James 1:22-27). Even within what is commonly called, “Christianity,” Jesus Himself taught that many who profess Him as Lord will be eternally lost because they do not obey what God says (Matt 7:21-23)! Therefore, do not find comfort in your religion unless your religion is true according to the teachings of the Bible!

He saw that his religious traditions were wrong

Part of Saul’s religion was based on keeping the Old Testament law. And, this is the law that he did live under before Christ’s new law came into effect in Acts 2 (also Col 2:14). However, Saul did not just practice religion based on the Old Testament law. Rather, he also practiced religion based on Jewish traditions. In fact, Jesus often took issue with the Jewish traditions that had been added to the law God had given (Matt 15:7-9).

In Galatians 1:13-16, Paul said, “For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God’s church and tried to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who from my mother’s womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.”

Saul could have been like many people today who never question whether their religious traditions are right and pleasing to God. But when he saw Jesus, Jesus challenged all of it. Although he still could have held on to his traditions rather than accept Jesus, Saul saw that his religious traditions were wrong! And, he chose to follow Jesus regardless of how many people would be angry with him for rejecting the Jewish traditions (and he was even persecuted because of this).

Today, you must evaluate your religious traditions to see whether they actually please God. Ask yourself why you believe all the things you currently believe and why you do all the things you currently do. Make no mistake about it, whenever you bring everything you believe and do to Jesus, He will often expose many things as being human traditions. And, He will expose many of these human traditions as being wrong. Then, when you see this, you will be faced with the choice of whether to obey Jesus or continue practicing your human traditions.

He saw that his conscience was wrong

When Saul began traveling on the road to Damascus, Saul had a clear conscience. In fact, Acts 23:1 records Paul as saying, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience to this day.” For Saul, this meant that he was even persecuting Christians with a clear conscience. Remember that he thought it was right and what God wanted him to do. Yet, when Jesus revealed Himself to Saul, Saul saw his conscience had been wrong.

We know this because of how Saul tried to change. If he thought he was right because he had lived in good conscience, then he could have just continued on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians. And, he certainly would not have needed to have his sins forgiven.

Yet, Saul saw that he only lived with a good conscience in doing wicked things because he had trained himself to believe those actions were right. Still, that clear conscience did not absolve him of the sins he had committed. He never once

defended himself before Jesus on the basis of having a good conscience in doing what he had done.

Today, you must see that your conscience can be wrong. Your conscience is a product of how you train it. Not one time in the Bible does it say your conscience will be the standard for how you will be judged (though you are taught not to violate your conscience). What God expects is for you to allow the truth of His word to train your conscience in what is actually right and wrong. Then, your conscience will help you live for God.

He Saw He Must Do Something to Be Saved

When Saul saw Jesus as the Messiah and that he had been wrong, he also saw his need to do something to be saved. He now wanted to be saved through Jesus Christ. But he had to do whatever Jesus instructed to be saved.

He saw he could not be saved by faith alone

Many people today will tell you that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus. However, there is no place in the Scriptures that indicates this. In fact, it says the exact opposite. Yet, it has become widely accepted human tradition to say that “Saul was saved on the road to Damascus.” But remember that Saul’s religious traditions were also wrong – and he changed what he believed and did based on the truth shown to him.

Many people believe and teach that salvation is by faith alone. That is, they believe and teach that all a person must do to be saved is to become mentally convinced that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, and Savior of the world. At this point of mental acceptance, a person is said to be saved (often coupled with asking Jesus into your heart through prayer).

Yet, if this is true, we should see it reflected in Saul’s conversion. Look at Acts 22:10. Upon Jesus revealing Himself to Saul, Saul asked, “What should I do, Lord?” [Note that a few Greek manuscripts also include this in Acts 9:6, though others do not]. Jesus then told Saul, “Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything that you have been assigned to do.” Similarly, Acts 9:6 records Jesus telling Saul, “But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

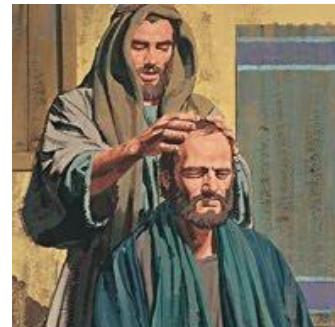
Please recognize that Saul had already believed in Jesus at this point, even calling Him “Lord.” But he was not saved. Jesus never even indicated that Saul was saved at this point. Instead, Jesus told Saul to go into the city to be told what

he “must do.” Therefore, we must follow Saul into Damascus to learn what he had to do to be saved. Yet, we can know that Saul was not saved on the road to Damascus by faith alone!

Today, you must see that you are not saved by faith alone. Perhaps you have been taught that you are. Perhaps you think back to what you thought was your conversion and think you were saved at the point of faith. However, the Bible even directly teaches that you are not saved by faith alone. For example, James 2:24 says, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” And, even if you have never believed you have been saved, recognize that you are not saved the moment that you believe in Jesus!

He saw he could not be saved by prayer

Another common belief and teaching concerning salvation is that people who believe in Jesus must ask Jesus into their hearts through prayer. This prayer (sometimes called the “Sinner’s Prayer”) is often viewed as being the moment an individual accepts Jesus Christ and is saved. However, Saul saw that prayer was not enough to save him from his sins. Although prayer does have a place in receiving the forgiveness of sins *after* someone becomes a Christian and sins again (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9), prayer does *not* bring about the initial forgiveness.



After Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul got up from the ground and was led by the hand into Damascus since he was now blind. Acts 9:9 says Saul was “unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.” And, when Jesus was telling Ananias to go preach the gospel to Saul, He said that Saul was “praying” in Judas’ house (Acts 9:11).

So, here was a sinner who was praying. Yet, this did not save him. The fact simply is that he could not have been saved at this point because he still had not been told what he must do (as Jesus had said)!

Today, you must see that you are not saved by prayer whenever you initially come to Jesus Christ. The Bible never teaches a “Sinner’s Prayer” as commonly taught and practiced today. And, it never expresses the idea of praying through to salvation. So, if you have been taught or believe that you are saved when you ask Jesus into your heart through prayer, you must see that this is human tradition rather than God’s teaching! This prayer simply will not save you!

He saw the need for obedience

Saul saw that he must do something to be saved. Again, when Saul asked Jesus what he must do, Jesus told Saul to go into the city to be told what he “must do” (Acts 9:6). Now, if Saul had been saved on the road to Damascus, there would have been nothing he had to do. For, Saul had already believed in Jesus! And, we would have expected Jesus to tell Saul, “Do? Why, you don’t have to do anything!”

This simply is not what Saul was told and not what Saul did. Even though Saul could not do anything to *earn* (deserve) his own salvation, there was something he had to do to obey God and be saved. You see, while many people will quote Paul in Romans 4:1-4 and Ephesians 2:8-9 to prove that we are not saved by works, they miss the point that Paul is talking about works a person does to earn salvation. And, there is simply nothing a person can do to earn salvation. Salvation is God’s gift no one can earn. Instead, it is received through true faith, which includes obedience. (See Heb 11 and James 2:14-26.)

Saul was not confused about this on the road to Damascus! He was determined to do whatever Jesus said, recognizing that he was a sinner in need of Jesus for salvation. Yet, although he could not do anything to earn his salvation, he knew that he must obey whatever Jesus said. For, Jesus is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb 5:9)! So, Saul went into Damascus as Jesus said, to learn from the man Jesus would send to him.

Today, you must see that you must obey Jesus to be saved. The Bible is clear in teaching that you must hear God’s words (Rom 10:17), believe in Jesus Christ (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9-10), be baptized (Acts 2:38), and remain faithful to Christ (Rev 2:10). Although you do not save yourself by doing these things, you must obey Jesus in this way to access His grace! For, Paul said that Jesus will punish those who do not obey the gospel (2 Thes 1:8-9)!

He saw the need for baptism

When Saul met with Ananias and learned what he had to do to be saved, Saul was baptized. Acts 9:18 says that after he regained his sight, he was baptized. But Acts 22:16 shows us what Saul saw about the need to be baptized. Ananias (the one appointed by Jesus to tell Saul what he must do) told Saul, “And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Notice that Saul was still in his sins because he had sins to wash away! So, if Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, he was saved before Ananias knew it – because Ananias told him to be baptized to wash away his sins. If Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, he was saved before he knew it – because he did what Jesus said and was baptized according to Ananias' instructions. And, if Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, he was saved before the Lord knew it – because the Lord told Saul to go into the city, knowing he would be told to be baptized to wash away his sins.

The simple fact is that Saul was not saved on the road to Damascus!

Saul saw the immediate need to be baptized to have his sins washed away (forgiven). This was a necessary part of calling on the name of the Lord.

(Compare with Rom 10:13.) In baptism, Saul was obeying Jesus' command and expressing his faith in and dependence on Jesus Christ for salvation. And, no matter how you look at it, the fact is that Saul was told baptism was necessary to having his sins washed away!



Today, you must see your need to be baptized to have your sins washed away so you can be saved. The Bible clearly teaches the essential nature of baptism. Read Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:27, and 1 Peter 3:20-21 as a sample of passages on the subject. It is a work that has been commanded and required by God for you to be saved – not something through which you can earn your own salvation! So, regardless of what human tradition says about baptism or who teaches you that baptism is not essential for salvation, learn from Saul that Jesus says it is essential! And, if you have not been baptized in the right way (by immersion, Rom 6:3-4) and for the right reasons (to be saved, forgiven, and to come into a right relationship with Jesus Christ), you must be baptized immediately! Do not delay!

He saw the need to live for Jesus

Saul did not just see his need to become a Christian by being baptized. Rather, he saw a need to continually live for Jesus Christ. In Acts 26:16-18, Paul said Jesus told him, “But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Then, Paul declared, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance” (Acts 26:19-20). In Galatians 2:20, Paul even declared, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

For Paul, this even meant suffering intense persecution in serving Jesus Christ and preaching His saving message to others! In 1 Corinthians 9:27, he wrote, “I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” So, he was determined to live his life in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ, knowing Jesus would save Him in the end (2 Tim 4:6-8)!

Today, you must see your need to live for Jesus. Jesus does not want you to become a Christian and then live to please yourself. Instead, you must give yourself in full obedience to Jesus Christ. It is only if you are faithful to Jesus throughout your life that Jesus will give you the crown of life in Heaven (Rev 2:10)! Paul wrote, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:57-58).

Conclusion

Saul was struck blind on the road to Damascus. Yet, even though he was blind, he saw some great things! Today, if you desire to please Jesus Christ and have Heaven as your eternal home, you must see all these same things and obey what God commands! If you will, your eyes will be opened. You will be turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that you will receive the forgiveness of your sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus (Acts 26:18)!



Light Lesson 24 Questions

Visual Perception: What the Blind Man Saw

He Saw Jesus as the Messiah

1. Who was Saul? What happened to Saul?

2. What did Saul see about having rejected Jesus as the Messiah?

3. What did Saul see about Jesus as the Savior?

4. What did Saul see about his opportunity to be saved?

He Saw He Had Been Wrong

1. What did Saul see about being a sinner?

2. What did Saul see about being religious?

3. What did Saul see about religious traditions?

4. What did Saul see about his conscience?

He Saw He Must Do Something to Be Saved

1. What did Saul see about being saved by faith alone?

2. What did Saul see about being saved by prayer?

3. What did Saul see about the need for obedience?

4. What did Saul see about the need for baptism?

5. What did Saul see about the need to live for Jesus?

Light Lesson 25

Visual Perception:

In the Twinkling of an Eye

by C. Aaron Fleenor and T.S. Stephens

Some Scriptural Texts (KJV)

1 Corinthians 15:48-54 As *is* the earthly, such *are* they also that are earthly: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. **49** And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. **50** Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. **51** Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, **52** In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. **53** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. **54** So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. **14** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. **15** 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. **16** 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: **17** 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. **18** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: **26** And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; **7** And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, **8** In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:**9** Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;**10** When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Mark 13:32-37 But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. **33** Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. **34** *For the Son of man is* as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. **35** Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: **36** Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. **37** And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

Luke 17:26-36 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. **27** They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. **28** Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; **29** But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. **30** Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. **31** In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. **32** Remember Lot's wife. **33** Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. **34** I tell you, in that night there shall be two *men* in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. **35** Two *women* shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. **36** Two *men* shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Matthew 16:27-28 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. **28** Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Romans 13:11-12 that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed. **12** 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.

James 5:7-10 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. **8** Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. **9** Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. **10** Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

1 Peter 4:5-7 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. **6** For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. **7** But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

2 Peter 3:9-12 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. **10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. **11** *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, **12** Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Discussion



The word *atomos* is a Greek word which has reference to the smallest entity imaginable and is the root or source for the word *atom*. When the atom was first named, it was thought to be the smallest particle of matter that is indivisible. Atomos is the word we translate “in the twinkling of an eye.” Just how fast is the twinkling of an eye? The results and opinions varied in the research encountered. One person affirmed a twinkling was 11/100ths of a second while another said it was at the speed of light—180,000

miles per second. Any way one might consider, “the twinkling of an eye” is extremely fast.

Considering how quick an actual twinkling is, we can see it has significant implications relative to our transformation at Jesus' return. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, Paul speaks of Jesus' return and our transformation happening in the twinkling of an eye. There will be no time for repentance, prayer, or baptism. There will be no time to prepare ourselves. In that 11/100ths of a second, the dead will rise, and the living will be changed from mortal to immortal. Also, in that same instance, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 indicates Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. They will be taking vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus. Think about what was said. The people subject to this punishment are not just those we might think of as evil or devoid of any knowledge of God. Those who do not obey the gospel are also in peril. That group includes those who reject the gospel altogether and those who have received the gospel message but decided not to obey. Lastly, those who obeyed but are not fully obedient to the gospel of Jesus are also included. 1 Peter 4:17 warns us that judgment will begin with the house of God, which is the church.



What should we do? Mark 13:33 tells us to **watch in patience and pray** because we do not know when the day of the Lord will come. Verse 32 indicates no one knows when that day will come. Not the angels or even Jesus Himself know. Only God the Father knows the day and hour. He will come as a thief in the night for those who are not prepared. As we discussed earlier, there will be no time to be reconciled to God when Jesus returns.

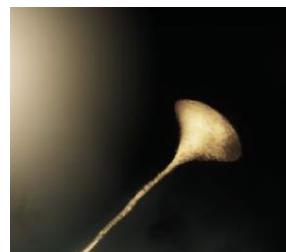


Deliverance from God Wrath

God wants us to be called from the darkness into His light. **Romans 13:11-12** instructs, “that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed. 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.” Paul calls it our “armour” as we are in a spiritual battle for souls. The breastplate of righteous, faith and love, the sword of faith, and the helmet of salvation are part of that armor (1 Thes 5:8; Eph 6:13-17) as we battle in a spiritual war. These weapons are mighty and powerful to bring every thought in obedience to God (2 Cor 10:3-5).



We must wait for Christ while living for God. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 teaches, “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” Thus, we are called into the light of the day to live lives, knowing that we will avoid the wrath of God and obtain salvation in the Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10 explains: “For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.” We can be ready when the trump of the Lord sounds.



Now Is the Time

Therefore, the time to prepare is now. We are told in 2 Corinthians 6:2 now is the day of salvation. Now is the time to be obedient to the gospel of Jesus: hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. Afterward, we can begin the work of being faithful unto death that we may receive a crown of righteousness (Rev 2:10b, KJV). We are taught to redeem the time. What is hindering us from using the opportunities



God has given to us? Is it one of the many dark distortions of Satan? Perhaps one of the most hideous of lies the Devil tells us that we have time. “God is not going to return tonight,” Satan whispers. How do you know? Or how do you know that He might not call your time done? He will return, and we will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. Some will be harvesting, working, and getting married at that moment. Are you ready for that instant?

Death can come in an instant too. A breath is all it takes for life to give way to death. One second there is breath, the next there is none. You can sit by a myriad of deathbeds, and even if it takes time for them to pass, it is the same. There is always that instant—now breath, now no breath, the twinkling of an eye.



Obedience

The path from darkness to light starts with obedience, but our transformation takes a lifetime. If we have obeyed but have not been faithful, now is the time to confess and repent of our sins so we may be forgiven (1 John 1:9). We read in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is not willing for any to perish. God does not want to condemn us with sin, and He has sacrificed His Son to allow us to escape His wrath. Think about what Isaiah 43:25 records: “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake; And I will not remember your Sins.” We must be obedient, faithful, and diligent. If we are not God will punish us for our sins. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). If we wait too long to obey, in the twinkling of an eye, it will be too late.

Review and Conclusion

We have spent the entire 2020 year examining “From Darkness to Light” and thinking about eye related topics in God’s instruction to us.

Looking back at “From Darkness to Light” in 2020, we have learned we must use a lens of faith or prism of eternity to see heaven, God, and even ourselves as God sees us. We have learned about many causes of spiritual blindness and how to cure it. We have learned about the dangers of false teachers. We have learned of the many lies Satan uses as tools to ensnare and enslave. Among the Devil’s dark distortions are worldly trinkets and bobbles, disappointment, deception, drugs, division, prejudice, pride, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. We have learned about the insidious nature of sin that we often let grow in our blind

spot. We have learned about the lies of covetousness Satan employs to capture people into pornography, immoral sexuality, and greed as opposed to God's plan of sanctification. All of these snares are when we fail to recognize that God is not enough!

We have also explored the Light and how God is the Creator and Light. We have also considered how He has given us His love, light, and holiness. This study should cause us to focus our eyes on Christ and to carry the light through service in God's kingdom. We learned to look to the parables for how Christ sees Himself, and thus also our own condition. We learned not to be wise in our own eyes but in the light of God's wisdom and righteousness. The fleshly or temporal focused person may not be able to see the light of heaven's love, kindness, grace, and joy, but the spiritually focused can see these things. Ultimately, we understand we walk by faith and not by sight. Christians must seek to walk in the light to build their lives and families. By knowing that God is enough, they can focus on the eternal rather than the temporal, laying up their treasures in heaven and living this life in that joy. The value of the whole world is insignificant to the value of one's soul. These lessons are only relevant if we use them in our lives – to grow and mature in service to God. Otherwise, we will face the wrath instead of the place Jesus has prepared (John 14:1-3; 1 Thes 1:10; 1 Thes 4:13-17; 1 Thes 5:9; Titus 2:13).



Light Lesson 25 Questions

Visual Perception: In the Twinkling of an Eye

1. What does 1 Corinthians 15:48-53 say will happen in the twinkling of an eye? Will we have time to react?
2. What does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 say will happen after the Lord descends from heaven with a shout? How does this comfort us?
3. What did Jesus mean in John 11:25 when he said, “I am the resurrection?”
4. According to 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 Jesus will come to be what in His saints?
5. Thinking of the Lord's return, what does Mark 13:32-37 encourage Christians to do? What will the world be doing according to Luke 17:26-36?
6. What does Romans 13:12 teach us to do? What does this mean?
7. Thinking about the Lord's return, what does James 5:7-10 encourage us to do?
8. Thinking about the Lord's return, what does 1 Peter 4:5-7 teach us to do?
9. Thinking of 2 Peter 3:9-12, knowing the Lord will come as a thief in the night, what impact should that have on our lives?