

INTRODUCTION

Through the years I have enjoyed reading the books by the country veterinarian James Herriot. His stories are full of humorous anecdotes of nighttime calls to treat large farm animals in Scotland. When I was called to serve as pastor of FBC Oneonta, Alabama, one of the members of the Pastor Search Committee was a large animal vet. Dr. Charlie Peyton and I became good friends. He sometimes called me late at night and asked if I'd like to go out to make a call with him to a Blount County farm. One particular cold, wet, winter's night we were called to a little farm where a cow was having difficulties birthing a calf. It was a pitch-black night and after walking for what seemed like miles we found the cow lying on her side obviously in trouble. Charlie handed me the one flashlight we had and he began to work. My job was to simply hold the light. It was one of those bone-chilling freezing nights and I soon was shivering from the cold. Although Charlie was doing the tough work, I found it hard to hold the light where he needed it. Charlie would say, “Give me some light, brother!” Two minutes later he would have to say, “Hold the light, brother! Keep on shining that light, brother!” To make matters worse his batteries were weak and the light began to grow dim. The farmer headed back to his house to get another light. Meanwhile, the cow was not waiting on the farmer, so I had to get closer—and on that night I got a lot more close up and personal with that cow than I ever intended! I got so close, several times she warned me to “moooooove.”

After working for a long time, Charlie got the unborn calf turned around and a normal delivery ensued. By this time, the flashlight was almost totally useless. I learned several things that night. First, country vets earn their living. Second, you better have a good light to shine on a dark night. As we drove back that night in his pickup, I was just starting to get feeling back into my fingers and toes. Charlie laughed about how many times he had to say to me, “Give me some light, brother!” He said, “You know, in a world lost in the darkness of sin, that's exactly what we need to do—to give them some light.”

For months after that night, when Charlie would see me at church, he would smile and say, “Give me some light, brother!” And I would say, “I'm shining for Jesus—and thank God, His batteries *never* run out.” That's what we ought to be doing—shining for Jesus—but it's not our light, it's His. Let's read about it in Luke 11:33-36:

“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”

Jesus loved to use word pictures and speak in parables. Here, he actually lays down three layers of meaning. On the surface layer, He points out that a lamp is no good under a bowl, because the light is blocked; the purpose of light is to give illumination and direction—not to be hidden. Then on a second layer He says our eyes are like a lamp to the body. Through the eyes, vision enters into our brains. But there is a third layer of meaning that gets down to spiritual truth. The eye is actually a picture of your mind, and if your mind is good at discerning information, your body

(life) will be filled with light. Jesus issues a stern warning about making sure your inner life is light instead of darkness.

Ray Stedman wrote: The eye is a symbol of the mind. It is the way we look at things. The eye observes, but it is the mind that perceives. What Jesus is saying is that if your eye is good you have a spiritual mind that sees everything clearly and truly. Your whole body is full of light. Life is in focus with everything in its proper perspective.

Throughout the scriptures, darkness is a symbol for wickedness and evil and light is a symbol of goodness and purity. Satan is called the prince of darkness and Jesus is the Light of the world. Jesus described hell as a place of outer darkness. Heaven is full of light and doesn't even need the sun to shine, because the glory of the Lord illuminates it. So the main point of what Jesus is saying is a contrast between spiritual darkness and His wonderful light. So, in this lesson we will talk about the darkness and then we'll study the light. First, we must

I. BE ALARMED AT THE DARKNESS AROUND US

Seldom do we ever get to experience *total* darkness. Once Cindy and I visited Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. The guides led us deep into the cave and at one point they warned us they were going to turn out the lights for 60 seconds. When they did, it became so dark I could not see my hand in front of my face. I thought if I was alone in that cave it would be impossible to find my way out without some kind of light. Then the guide struck one match and it was amazing how that small flame illuminated the huge underground room we were in.

We live in a culture that is spiritually and morally in darkness as well. I love America, and I'm glad to be an American, but I grieve because our culture is leading the world in pornography, divorce and violence. Our culture is growing more and more wicked. I hear people complain about the words and scenes they witness on network television programs that were only on pay-per-view channels 10 years ago. By the way, if you are complaining about it, most television sets have an on/off button. Turn it off and write to the advertisers and tell them why you are turning it off. Someone once said a hypocrite is someone who complains about the amount of sex and violence on their VCR!

But to me, the greatest danger is not what is happening in our culture. The greatest danger is how Christians are not alarmed by it. Let me mention two dark dangers in America:

1. We have grown accustomed to the darkness

Sometimes, Cindy and I will go out on a date to one of these fine restaurants where the lighting is very subdued and dim. It's so dark you can hardly read the menu. When you see the prices, you know why they want to keep it dark! But when you sit there for a few minutes, you gradually begin to be able to see more clearly. Is it because they have turned up the lights? No, but because, over time, your eyes get adjusted to the darkness. When it comes to the spiritual and moral climate of America, the same thing has happened.

Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19) In this world of spiritual and moral darkness, too many Christians have simply adjusted their spiritual sight and have grown accustomed to the darkness. What should alarm us only amuses us.

Vance Havner wrote: “Physically, man walks in unprecedented brilliance, while his soul dwells in unmitigated night. He can release a nuclear glory that outdazzles the sun, and with it he plans his own destruction. He can put satellites in the sky, and left to himself, he is a wandering star to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever ... We not only live in the dark, we get used to it. There is a slow, subtle, sinister brainwashing process going on and by it we are gradually being desensitized to evil. Little by little, sin is made to appear less sinful until the light within us becomes darkness—and how great is the darkness! (*Why Not Just Be Christians?* p. 19)

It’s the old frog-in-the-kettle scenario you’ve heard before. You put a frog in hot water and it will try to escape. But if you put a frog in lukewarm water and slowly and gradually raise the temperature, he will swim around happily until, without realizing it, he dies from the heat of the water. Over the past few years the devil has been slowly but surely lowering the rheostat of our culture. It’s been getting darker and darker at such a gradual rate we haven’t even noticed it.

In the name of tolerance, we now embrace things that used to disgust us. The poet Alexander Pope said it well when he wrote: “Vice is a monster of such frightful mien, / As to be hated needs but to be seen; / Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

Another dark danger in America is that

2. We have mistaken the darkness for light

Look again at what Jesus said in verse 35, “Make sure that the light within you is not darkness.” He was warning us of the danger of mistaking darkness for light. The Bible says: “Woe to them who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.” (Isaiah 5:20)

As Christians we have not only gotten accustomed to the light, but many Christians no longer are willing to call sin sin. We give sin all kinds of pretty names to make it seem more acceptable. We don’t call it adultery any longer; we call it an affair. It’s no longer sodomy; it’s a gay lifestyle. Get the picture? This past summer at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans, Fred Luter preached the annual convention sermon. He was talking along these lines and he said we will never hate sin until we see sin as God sees sin. I agree with him. I got to thinking and have discovered from A-Z, man sees sin differently than from the way God sees sin:

Man sees sin as an Accident, God sees sin as Abomination;

Man sees sin as a Blunder, God sees sin as Blindness;

Man sees sin as a Chance; God sees sin as a Choice;

Man sees sin as a Disease, God sees sin as Death;
Man calls sin Error, God calls sin Enmity;
Man sees sin as Fascination, God sees sin as Fatal;
Man sees sin as Glamour; God sees sin as Gruesome—we must see sin the way God sees sin!
Man sees sin as Habit, God sees sin as Hellish;
Man sees sin as Innocence, God sees sin as Immoral;
Man sees sin as a Joke; God sees sin as Judgement;
Man sees sin as Know-how; God sees sin as a Knock-out;
Man sees sin as Looking; God sees sin as Lusting;
Man sees sin as Mischievous, God sees sin as Misery;
What man calls Natural, God sees as Naughty;
Man sees sin as Opportunity; God sees sin as Opposition;
Man sees sin as Performance, God sees sin as Pathetic. We must see sin the way God sees sin.
Man sees sin as a Quota, God sees sin as Quicksand;
Man sees sin as Rational, God sees sin as Repulsive;
Man sees sin as Safe, God calls sin a Scandal;
Man calls sin a Treat, God calls sin Treason;
Man calls sin Usual, God calls sin Ugly;
Man calls sin in Vogue, God calls sin Vulgar;
Man calls sin Weakness, God calls sin Wickedness;
Man calls sin an X-ray, God calls sin X-rated;
Man calls sin Yummy, God calls sin Yucky;
Man calls sin Zealous, God calls sin Zero.

From A to Z we must see sin as God sees sin! We will never hate and deplore sin in our lives and in our country until we stop calling it by these nice, pet names. God hates sin; we must, too. The darkness around us is growing darker. We have gotten used to the darkness and we have started calling darkness light.

The Bible says: “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather, expose them.” (Ephesians 5:11) Jesus is saying although we live in a world full of darkness, we must live in the light; we must dare to be different. Did you hear about the guy driving home from work? His car phone rang and his wife warned him to be careful because the news just reported there was an idiot driving in the opposite direction on his highway. He replied to his wife, “It’s not just one guy, there are hundreds going in the wrong direction!” In a culture of darkness such as ours, we are going to have to be willing to go against the flow if we are going to live in the light. You and I should be alarmed at the darkness around us, but you must

II. BE ALERT TO THE LIGHT WITHIN YOU

In verse 34 Jesus said a person’s life may be filled with light or filled with darkness. He is speaking of an inner light—a light within your heart. We often speak of someone being “light-hearted” if they are happy and carefree. But here, Jesus uses the symbol of light to teach us a person’s inner life can either be illuminated with God’s goodness or be filled with darkness and wickedness. How much light is dwelling in your heart today?

You may be tempted to say, “Well, I have some light and some darkness there.” Sorry, but light and darkness are mutually exclusive—they can’t exist together. Some people wonder how to get rid of some of the old habits and deeds of darkness. If you walk into a dark room, you don’t have to sweep out the darkness, all you have to do is to introduce light—and the darkness is gone.

If you really want your heart to stay filled with light, you should know

There are three good sources of light:

1. God’s Son—reigning in your heart

Jesus was born into a world lost in the darkness of sin and proclaimed, “I am the light of the world.” The Apostle John wrote: “In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” (John 1:4-5) One of the most basic elements of the entire universe is light. Light is all around us, and yet is somewhat mysterious. Have you ever heard of the theory of relativity? Someone said the theory of relativity is “if you have money, you will have relatives you didn’t know about.” That may be true, but it’s not the *real* theory of relativity. When Albert Einstein was trying to develop a way to relate energy to mass, he used the speed of light as the point of reference. He did this because he believed light was the only constant in the physical universe. Thus, he formulated that Energy was equal to mass times the speed of light squared ($E=mc^2$).

Light is truly amazing. It travels at the speed of 186,234 miles per second. To demonstrate that, if I could fire a gun due east and it traveled at the speed of light hugging the contour of the earth, it would circle the globe and penetrate my body seven times in less than a second. That’s fast! Today, voice and data streams are carried on light in fiber optic cables. And one of the most basic descriptions of God is found in I John 1:5, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

If you want to be light-hearted you must allow the light of Jesus to shine into your heart. Genesis 1:1 tells us before creation there was darkness and chaos and God simply said, “Light, be!” and there was light. When you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, He comes to the chaos and darkness of your sinful heart and “re-creates” it. He says, “Light, be!” and your heart fills with the light of His goodness and righteousness. The choice is yours: dark-hearted or light-hearted. D.C. Talk is one of my favorite Christian music groups. The lyrics of their songs are powerful. The song “In the Light” says:

I keep trying to find a life
On my own, apart from you
I am the king of excuses
I’ve got one for every selfish thing I do.

What’s going on inside of me?
I despise my own behavior
This only serves to confirm my suspicions
That I’m still a man in need of a Savior.

The disease of self runs through my blood

It's cancer fatal to my soul
Every attempt on my behalf has failed
To bring this sickness under control

I wanna be in the light
As you are in the light
I wanna shine like the stars in the heavens
Oh, Lord, be my light and be my Salvation
All I want is to be in the light.

(DC Talk “In the Light” from *Jesus Freak*, Virgin Records 1996)

2. God's Word—revealed in your heart

There is another light God wants to shine into your darkness and that is the light of His Word. The Bible says, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105) Have you ever seen a cartoon where a person gets an idea and a light bulb clicks on in their mind? That's what Jesus is talking about. When the truth of God's Word fills your mind, there will be light. People are searching for truth today. I believe ultimate truth is only found in God's Word. Every time I read God's Word I'm asking Him to illuminate my ignorance. God's Word is a light for our pathway; that means God gave us His Word not to simply be studied, but to guide our lives, to give us direction. Some people study the Bible like a first-year medical student studies a cadaver. They take it apart and dissect it, but, to them, it's just a dead book of religious history. God's Word is to be used like a flashlight to illuminate our way. Sometimes God only illuminates the next few steps when we want to see the “whole picture.”

Most books I read, I put them down and never read them again. But I've read God's Word dozens of times, and I'll read it until the day I die because God keeps using it to light my pathway. Some people would like for God to instantly reveal ALL the truth there is to know. If He did that, you couldn't handle it. It would be like trying to eat all the food you'll ever eat for the rest of your life at one sitting—you couldn't hold it! I came across an interesting poem in my files; and the author was not listed. It speaks of how we can only absorb a limited amount of God's truth at any one time:

To human eyes, too much of light
Is blinding as the blackest night.
And this is so, too, of the mind
In total ignorance it is blind.
But more truth than it can absorb
Will overwhelm our mental orb.

So, lest our vision burn to ashes
God shows us truth in bits and flashes,
White revelations that the brain
Can comprehend and still stay sane.
And we poor fools, demand truth's noon
Who scarce can bear its crescent moon.

Do you feel like you are stumbling around in a moral darkness? Get into God's Word and He will use it to light you way.

3. God's children—reflecting light to others

There is one more good source of light, and it is us! When Jesus spoke about putting a lamp so it will give light everyone can see He was speaking of the need for us to let our light shine. If you don't have an inner light, you certainly won't have a light to shine.

A five-year-old girl was preparing for the Christmas play in her Sunday School. Each child had only one line about Jesus. Some said, "I am the bread of life" or "I am the resurrection and the life." Her one line was "I am the light of the world." She rehearsed and rehearsed with her mom before the play. But when the time came for her line, she froze. From the side stage her mother whispered, "I am the light of the world!" Again a little louder she whispered, "I am the light of the world." Finally her daughter looked at her and turned to the people and delivered her line: "My mother is the light of the world!"

Jesus did say He was the light of the world, but then He said *we* are the light of the world, too. He told us to "Let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify my Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) Which one is it? Is *He* the light of the world, or are we? Yes. But there is a big difference between His light and our light. It's the difference between our sun and moon. The sun generates its own light, but the moon only reflects the light of the sun. The same is true with us. Jesus radiates light, and we reflect the light. You can't let your light shine unless Jesus is living and shining in your life.

Our world needs the light of Jesus now more than ever. The Bible says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.)" (Ephesians 5:8-10) "... Children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." (Philippians 2:15-16)

Have you ever seen someone who is almost visibly shining with the glory of God? You can almost see the light of Jesus shining out through their eyes. Jesus said your eye is the lamp of the body; that also means His light can shine out through your eyes. People can lie with their lips and lie with their words, but they can seldom lie with their eyes.

In Acts 6, when the Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin, the Bible says everyone looked at him and they saw he had a face like that of an angel. Angels are often described as having shining faces. Stephen was literally shining for Jesus. Moments later they stoned him to death.

Our job is to shine for Jesus, too. We live in a dark world. It's getting darker, and we have gotten accustomed to the light. What a tragedy! The only hope for America is Jesus. The only hope for our world is Jesus. And He wants to shine His light through you.

One reason I'm so passionate to take the light of Jesus to China is because there is so much spiritual darkness there. But you don't have to go to China to let your light shine and you don't have to die like Stephen for your light to shine. God just wants you to let your light shine wherever you are.

Jesus warned us we should not put our candle under a bushel, but we need to let it shine so everyone can see it. A pastor friend of mine from Birmingham, Charles Carter, preached here a

couple of summers ago. When Charles was in college he had a friend who was not a Christian. Charles had been wanted to witness to him but he kept putting it off. One day Charles and his friend were playing tennis. When they approached the net to pick up some balls, Charles bent over and a gospel tract fell out his pocket to the court. It was about the four spiritual laws. His friend asked him what it was. Charles says it would have been so easy to have handed him the tract and asked him to read it but he hid his light under a bushel. He picked up the tract and stuck it back into his pocket and said, “Oh it’s nothing.” The very next day, Charles learned his friend had died in an automobile accident a few hours after they finished playing tennis. Charles said he promised God he would never hide his light again. Do you know someone who needs to see your light?

Like my veterinarian friend, Dr. Payton, there are thousands of people around us living in darkness and although they may not be saying with their lips, they are saying by their lifestyles: “Give me some light, brother. Give me some light, sister!” Do you *see* the light? Will you *be* the light?

OUTLINE

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Two Dark Dangers in America:

1. We have grown accustomed to the darkness

Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” *John 3:19*

2. Mistaken the darkness for Light

“Woe to them who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.” *Isaiah 5:20*

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather, expose them.” *Ephesians 5:11*

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Good sources of Light:

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“In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” *John 1:6-7*

2. God’s Word—revealed in your heart

“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” *Psalms 119:105*

3. God’s children—reflecting Light to others

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.)” *Ephesians 5:8-10*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes