

To God Alone Be The Glory

When miners get trapped in a mine and then they are rescued, the sunshine moves them. They squint their eyes up at the sky and put their hands up to shield against the bright light. A smile creeps across their face, joy bubbles up, and sometimes a happy dance follows.

You don't have to get stuck in a mine to appreciate the sunshine! Minnesota's dull winters are enough to make us a little grumpy with their pervasively overcast skies. But bring out a sunny day, and everyone is easier than usual to get along with.

There's another kind of sunshine. When people have been away from God and his Word, or they let a sin take hold of their heart, it's like getting trapped in a deep mine. But, oh, the expression on their face when the Holy Spirit brings them out of that spiritually dark place into the sunshine of God's grace—faith looks up to Jesus, the Light of the world, and squints at his brightness. A smile creeps across their whole person. Joy comes bubbling up. Some penitent people have even been known to do a happy dance. The Holy Spirit loves working in people's hearts through God's Word. He wants everyone to enjoy the light of Jesus all the time. As God's people we want this too. LET THE SON SHINE.

The apostle Paul was aware of what dark lives the Ephesians led before Christ

shined on them. He wanted to remind them of their past for a just a minute without making them feel guilty about the sins they had already received forgiveness for. So he says, ^{8a}“*You were once darkness.*”

We were once darkness too. It's not just that we were “in the dark” (didn't know the truth). We were also misled by the wickedness that pervades our society, and we may have misled others. It might be painful to search your memory banks, but you can probably remember a time when you instigated a sin and led at least one other person to go along with you. We were darkness. We needed the Son of God to rise up over the horizon, show us what we were doing wrong, and show us himself as the cure for such darkness.

Years before the Son shined on us, other believers in Christ started praying for you and me when they spoke the words “Thy kingdom come”: ‘Let your gracious rule extend to the hearts of all those who don't yet trust Jesus as Savior.’ Christians were singing mission hymns about our conversion for hundreds of years. They wanted us, when we would finally be born, to leave our darkness and look to Christ, the Son-shine of this world. The last verse of our sermon text is about others being brought to faith. We think it was part of an early Christian mission hymn: ¹⁴“*Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*” What a picture! Living without Jesus is like sleeping. Or maybe it would

be clearer to think of ‘living without Jesus’ as ‘spiritual sleep walking.’ Maybe you know some crazy sleep walking stories. I’ve heard about people who got into their car, drove away, and woke up in their car somewhere else. One person sleep walked into the kitchen, took his medication, woke up in the kitchen, and got angry because ‘someone’ had moved his midnight dosage. What a picture of living without Jesus! People wandering around, carrying out normal life functions, not fully aware of what’s happening to them spiritually or what danger they’re in when they don’t trust Christ as their Redeemer.

Some of us can remember back to a time before we knew the Savior. Others of us were baptized as infants but wandered away from Christ for a while, perhaps during the years of youthful rebellion. If you have ever spiritually sleep walked, you know how dark those times were. But someone loved you enough to wake you up with God’s Word. The Holy Spirit raised you from spiritual death. The Son of God shined on you, and, wow, did things change!

^{8b}“*Now you are light in the Lord.*” Think about that. It’s not just that Christ enlightened your soul so that you now see clearly what’s going on between you and the Lord. You yourselves have become *light in the Lord*. God’s Word has turned you into someone who influences others for the good. Christ is

shining his light through you. It’s in your behavior, your attitudes, your tone of voice, the lack of hurtful sarcasm in your responses. It’s in how quickly you admit to wrongdoing and seek to make things right with the people you’ve hurt. It’s in how quickly you forgive those who have wronged you and how hard you work at making peace with them. It’s in the topics of your conversation, the content of your jokes, the choice of your videos and movies and TV and books and internet sites. Some people are uncomfortable using bad language around you because they’ve noticed that you actually use real adjectives and real adverbs, instead of lazy F-bombs. Some people come to you for godly advice, or they ask you to pray for them, or they want you to explain a part of the Bible to them. Yes, some people exhibit hostility toward you, but your loving replies disarm them for calmer conversation. People are inspired when you go out of your way to help them or others in need. They are surprised and grateful when you point out that they have given you too much change from their cash register. They are amazed when you leave them a nice tip even though they brought you the wrong food order or spilled something on you. When your unmarried friends or relatives come to your home, they know you won’t bed them down in the same room as their boyfriend or girlfriend because you have too much respect for God’s intent to bless sex only within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman. People know that when they

come to your home for the weekend, you want them to come with you for Sunday morning worship. The Son is shining on you and in you and through you. Jesus is working hard through his Word to keep you away from the dark. That's why you^{8c} *“live as children of light.”*

Paul takes us deeper by saying: ⁹*“The fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.”* Our words and behaviors can be called good when God finds them admirable and beneficial. Our words and behaviors are righteous when they conform to God's standards. Truth happens when our version of events would recognize itself as an accurate portrayal of what really happened. We know the Son of God is shining in our hearts when these and other fruits of light are present in our lives. It pleases God to LET THE SON SHINE in us. It pleases us too.

But what if we're not sure whether something is good, righteous, or truthful? That's when we follow this verse: ¹⁰*“Find out what pleases the Lord.”* Or to bring out the meaning of the Greek more fully: *“Give your approval on what pleases the Lord.”* Okay, but how can I know what pleases the Lord? Answer: read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word. Daily Bible reading. Weekly Bible study. Faithful worship attendance. The Bible is where the Lord revealed what pleases him. If you need the cliff-notes version of what pleases the Lord, break out your Catechism. Luther

summarized what the Bible teaches in his explanations about the Ten Commandments. As soon as you are familiar with the Catechism, dig in to the Scriptures to see how biblical Luther's simple summaries are.

Enjoy fully all the behaviors and attitudes that please the Lord. But when behaviors or attitudes go against God's will, this verse applies: ¹¹*“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”* What great wisdom to follow so we don't fall back into darkness! Let's say you have some friends that you do things with fairly often. But most times that you get together, you end up tearing down other peoples' reputations or drinking to excess or telling dirty jokes or cussing or acting like you could do a much better job if you were in charge. If that's the case, it's time to talk to your friends and see if they are willing to stop dabbling in these *“fruitless deeds of darkness.”* If your friends have no desire to change, it's time to make new friends. You might find that the people sitting around you now can be good friends—not perfect, but the kind of friends that are much less likely to lead you toward spiritual darkness. There's a study which shows that most people who join a church as adults end up with a completely different circle of friends within seven years. When they join a church and don't make new friends, they often

leave that church within seven years. Why? Sometimes it's because their old friends drag them back into the dark. LET THE SON SHINE in your choice of friends.

Apply the same test to your music. The genre of music isn't that important. But do check out the words. Shouldn't our music bolster the things God has taught us? At least the words should not contradict God's will. If the words are good, sing the song, memorize it, use it to praise the Lord. If the words are bad, write new words so you can enjoy the melody. Or "*have nothing to do with it.*"

¹²*"For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret."* Wait a minute. First Paul said to expose what is evil, and now he says it's shameful to mention what is done in secret. Is this a contradiction? No. Without approving of what people do in secret, or what they do out in the open these days, we can still repeat the truths of God's Word. We can say that all forms of sexuality, except what happens between husband and wife, are not God's will. It's a shame that we have to speak about things that should not be happening. But when you speak the truths that God reveals in the Bible, the light is going to expose what God doesn't want us to do or even to speak about as positive or good.

Have you ever sat on a pin or something pokey-sharp? Remember the shockwave of anger that rolled through you. A similar wave of anger rolls through when your conscience gets pricked. So you can understand why people who are sinning erupt like a volcano when you point out the evil they are doing. Oh, the nasty things they can yell! They want to make it so unpleasant for you to speak the truth that you'll never bother them again or anyone else with your "silly morality."

But sometimes when you expose sin with the mirror of God's law, the sinful flesh of people is crushed and they are brought to repentance. It can take a while: at first they may be angry, but later on they come around and tell you they're sorry for getting upset and that you were right. So you show them how much the Lord loved all sinners, including yourself, by letting Jesus pay for all sins on the cross. Well, no wonder Paul urges us to expose evil for what it is! This helps us stay away from evil, and it might draw someone else out of the darkness. And then Christ will shine on them with his warming light of forgiveness. That's what God really wants. He wants to bring all people into the light and keep them away from darkness. O Lord, LET THE SON SHINE, for us, on us, in us, through us—for your glory and for the benefit of others.