

The Goodness of Light

By Daryl Wingerd

As I grow older, I find myself noticing darkness more and more. Perhaps my increasing awareness is due to a mild decline in my vision, my 20/20 days being long past! In any case my awareness of darkness was accentuated a few weeks ago when we set the clocks back. Gone for now are those bright summer evenings with sunsets that linger well past 9PM, giving way to 5PM sunsets and black of night by 7:00.



My awareness of darkness is not to be equated with a fondness for darkness. In fact, I don't care for it at all. Aside from the kind of darkness that exists behind my eyelids while I'm sleeping, I find myself strongly partial to light. If I buy a flashlight, it will be a very bright one. I prefer brightly lit rooms and high beams while driving (I still switch to dim when required for oncoming traffic, but sometimes a bit begrudgingly). I'm fascinated by, and a bit envious of, those three huge and brilliant headlights on the front of freight locomotives. Anything that dispels the darkness thoroughly is my friend, and the brighter, the friendlier.

As I consider these distinctions between physical darkness and light, I am also aware of the "darkness" of my aging father's near total vision loss. To him, whether summer, winter, spring, or fall, even the brightest day is dim, and low-light conditions appear to him almost as night. The path before him, however smooth and straight, is no longer easy to navigate as he feels tentatively for each small step. Having fallen a few times, he needs a steady-handed escort for nearly every walk outside of the familiar setting of his own home. Often as I walk with him, I describe what lies ahead and steer him clear of even small obstacles. I act as his stand-in for the "light" of good vision.

Watching my father struggle in this way leads me to think of the spiritual darkness of this world, and of those who walk its treacherous paths. Though they may see clearly in ways that my father cannot, being blind to the moral and spiritual pitfalls and snares that lie in their way, they blunder pitifully along. Not only do they lack a reliable escort to help them avoid trouble, they are drawn to similarly blind companions. As might be expected when the blind lead the blind, they stumble and fall into deeper and deeper misery, storing up wrath for themselves in

the day of God's judgement. "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Of the people in this pathetic condition John wrote, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). They love what will destroy them, and they hate what could save them.

Despite the physical darkness that invades earlier and earlier each evening in the winter, a corresponding spiritual blessing is depicted as people begin to light up their homes and yards for Christmas. Ironically, it is the encroaching darkness that provides the perfect canvas for this artistic display. Whether the people who set out these lights realize it or not, to those who understand the true meaning of Christmas they represent a cheerful goodness, a reminder that though the darkness has always afflicted mankind, it did not, has not, and shall not overcome the light. As John wrote in the introduction to his gospel,

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 was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

Jesus—the "Word" John wrote of—later said of himself, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Therein lies the critical option before all people, including you: Will you go on stumbling in spiritual darkness, leading to death and condemnation? Or will you follow Jesus who is the light of life, to eternal life?

If you will consider this carefully and with your strongest sense of self-interest, you will soon be, along with all other followers of Jesus, be "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12-14).