

# THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2:19

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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.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

## **From The Editor's Desk**

A Child of God or Not?

Many who profess to be followers of Jesus are not immune to being assailed on rare occasions by doubt as to whether or not they are truly saved and living as sons and daughters of the King.

It is a question I have explored for myself more than once and have been blessed with encouragement and guidance from the Word of God and have listed here for your own self-examination some points to consider and their applicable scripture references, you may in your studies of them find additional verses that may speak to you in this matter of being a child of God.

- People are either children of God or children of the devil. 1 John 5:3-4
- There are those who are children of the devil and believe not Jesus John 8:44
- There are those who have been given the right to become children of God. John 1:12, 1 John 5:12
- Which are you? 2 Corinthians 13:5
- Children of God obey the Bible – Children of the Devil do not 1 John 2:3-4
- People are either children of God or children of the devil. 1 John 3:10
- Children of God walk as Jesus did – Children of the Devil carry out the Devil's desires 1 John 2:5-6, John 8:44
- Children of God acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God in accordance with the Bible – Children of the Devil deny the Biblical Jesus 1 John 2:23
- Children of God accept the apostles teachings Children of the Devil do not listen to the apostles 1 John 4:6
- Children of God live an overall righteous lifestyle, Children of the Devil do not live righteously 1 John 3:7-10 1 John 2:29
- Children of God love other Christians, Children of the Devil hate Christians 1 John 3:10 1 John 3:13-15
- Those born of God practice Christian love, those of the Devil do not 1 John 4:7-8
- But such love must be characterized through application and consistent with the truth of the scripture. 1 John 3:18-19 1 Corinthians 13:4-8
- Children of God endure in the faith – False Christians not 1 John 2:19

*J.v.L.*



## The Relevant Gospel – Transforming Lives

*Linford Berry*

*Calvary Mennonite Fellowship*

### *From the Pulpit*

Jesus said to them “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” [Luke 4:43](#)  
And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. [Matthew 24:14](#)

How is the Gospel relevant, what good is it and why do we need it?

There are lots of people in our world today, including us, who find ways to create a gospel that is not the real Gospel. We have ways of trying to create a formula, a list of dos and don'ts, a checklist where what we do is check off the boxes and then we will have the Gospel and tonight I hope to be able to address some of those kinds of tendencies we tend to have.

I want to ask two questions and I'm going to try and answer them, at least in summary, the questions are:

1<sup>st</sup> is: What is the Gospel? What is it that we're talking about here?

The 2<sup>nd</sup> is: Why do I need the Gospel?

Now the answer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question will become apparent as we start answering the 1<sup>st</sup> question: What is the Gospel and why do I need it?

Well first of all as we look at the Gospel, as mentioned it means good news, the word translated Gospel in our biblical text means good news, it is news for proclaiming, it is a message that brings joy.

Think with me to one of the declarations of this in Luke 2 when the angels came to bring this message to the shepherds that were out in the fields keeping their flocks at night and the angel said, Fear not, for behold I bring you good news, (that's the Gospel) I bring you good news of a great joy, that's the kind of message that we have, the kind of good news is something that brings great joy, this joy will be for all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. ([Luke 2:10-11](#))

Now there is something else we must say about this message, this good news, and that is that it must be intelligible, it cannot be good news unless you understand it, there is no way for it to be good news unless you understand it, for the news to be good it must be intelligible, it must be heard, it must be understood, it must be explained and we're talking about the Gospel, we are talking about understanding and explaining, we are talking about doctrine, we are talking about teaching and this requires words, It should not be strange to us that the message of the Gospel requires words for we serve a God who is the Word we serve a God who reveals himself through the Word.

No one will ever get saved by looking at a picture or at a sunset or at any number of other things that we can see in our world, it takes words, it must be explained, there must be explanation and there must be understanding. Romans chapter 10 says faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, [Romans 10:17](#). God provided the word so that we can understand the good news, God himself is the Word.

But the Gospel is not merely about being explained, explanation is necessary to the Gospel but it is not ultimate, it is not primary.

Think with me about this, some of you are young enough to remember if you ever wrote love letters to your dearest, maybe you still do that would be a good thing, that love letter did require some explanation, but we did not analyse it for grammar and logic and all those kinds of things, no we read the letter so we could learn about and grow in our understanding and appreciation for the person and so we didn't major on the explanation and I think we sometimes get this backwards in our reading of the Word of God, our understanding of the Gospel, we look for all the technicalities and attempt to formulate a nice tidy little message but what God wants us to do is to see him to know him, to enjoy him.

So the Gospel is not merely about being explained although explanation is necessary. Having said all of that what is the content of the good news, the message of the Gospel that we are to proclaim, to preach, to believe?

Well one good place to start would be with the biblical references that describe, define for us the Gospel what it is. Interestingly enough the Bible uses the Greek: *euangelion* that we translate Gospel, or good news, it uses that 77 times in the Greek New Testament (ESV) it uses the noun when we

talk about The Gospel, 55 times it also uses the Greek verb form of that translated to preach the Gospel, to proclaim the Gospel. So if we were to look at all 132 instances of these we would probably get a pretty good idea what the Gospel is and what we are to be doing with it, we don't have time to do all of that tonight so let's just take a kind of stroll through.

What is the Gospel, what is this message?

First of all there is a living God who made the earth and the heaven and the sea and everything that exists in them.

The Apostle Paul says in [Acts 14:15](#) we bring you good news, we bring you the Gospel that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who has made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

So we have a God who created everything, that's good news.

We have a living God, not just any God but a living God who is a Creator God. Not only does this living God exist but the Bible also tells us He is King, that He rules over everything that He created everything that exists. [Isaiah 52:7](#), How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. There is the Gospel. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation. So what is he saying is the message of the good news that brings peace, your God reigns that's the message, that's the message of the Gospel.

Our God reigns, He rules, He is sovereign over that which He has created.

For if God does not reign as King of the universe that He created then how can there be any good news if God does not govern and rule?

The coming of Jesus Christ is good news, we have already referenced that from Luke 2 when the angel said, Behold I bring you good news, I bring you the Gospel for unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

The coming of Jesus is good news because Jesus is King, the arrival of King Jesus is good news, Jesus says the kingdom of God is at hand, the kingdom of God has come, repent and believe. [Mark 1:15](#)

For the King of the universe has come as a Saviour.

Now not only did the King come but the King died.

Now I would remind you brothers, this is Paul speaking, 1 Corinthians 15, 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, here he reminds us of the Gospel, for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ, King Jesus, died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

Christ the King, the Creator, the King, the Saviour died for us to bear our sins since we could not, we were helpless in terms of dealing with our sin but it wouldn't be good news at all if He stayed dead and so Paul quickly goes on to say that He was buried and raised the third day also in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

As a matter of fact he says the resurrection is so important that without it we would be of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

It definitely would not be good news, it would not be the Gospel without the resurrection because what good is a dead king?

But that is not all there is much more to the Gospel, the good news of the Gospel also includes the promise that God will send the Holy Spirit to live within us, Jesus says you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you (Acts 1:8)

Ephesians 1 says in Him you also when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14. The Holy Spirit is given to us in the Gospel as a down payment on the full inheritance that is ours in Christ and He does this so that we can begin to experience in the here and now the fulfilment, the joy, the satisfaction that comes in knowing God. The promise of the Spirit in the Gospel makes it good news.

We know also that the Gospel is a gift, the whole of the Gospel is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8, if we had to pay for this it would not be such good news because we couldn't pay enough. It is the grace of God that provides the Gospel, it is the grace of God that provides both the message of the Gospel and the means of the Gospel, it is the gift of God.

What about salvation? I thought salvation was what the Gospel was all about, Romans 1:16, for I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

If you read that carefully you realise that the Gospel is not salvation per se, the Gospel is the power of God that brings salvation, so salvation here is a result of the Gospel, indeed the promise of salvation is part of the good news but the actual experience of salvation is not a part of the good news it is the result of the good news.

How about peace with God and each other?

The Gospel brings peace with God, preaching good news that's the Gospel of peace through Jesus Christ, [Acts 10:36](#).

The Gospel also brings eternal life, [2 Timothy 1:8-10](#)<sup>8</sup> Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God,<sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,<sup>10</sup> and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

Eternal life is a part of this message, this good news.

And we have not yet begun to exhaust nearly exhaust all the references and explanations in Scripture regarding what the Gospel is. The Gospel is very multifaceted it is very rich, it is inexhaustible, and the reason for that should become clear as we go a little further. Let me say this about all of things that we have already looked at all the parts of the message of the good news, none of these things as good as they are, and they are good, none of them is the final good of the good news, none of them by themselves is purely finally good.

You see God himself is the good news, if God himself is not the result or the purpose of the Gospel if all those good things, the salvation, the peace, the eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, if all of those things do not take us to God, do not reconcile us the God then it isn't really good news but what makes all of these things good is that they ultimately lead us to God himself and since God is ultimately good, since good is so multifaceted, so rich, so diverse then it stands to reason that the message of the Gospel is also one of many dimensions.

The message of the Gospel is one of inexhaustible glory because God is the Gospel. The whole point of the Gospel is God himself, [1 Peter 3:18](#),

Christ also suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous. Why, why did He do that? To make us feel better, to save us from hell, to help us live a better life, why did Christ suffer the righteous for the unrighteous? It says that He might bring us to God. That's what this is all about, Christ did that went through that suffering, Christ the righteous for the unrighteous that He might bring us to God.

Now did He in the process of bringing us to God bring us peace? Yes.

Does He bring us eternal life? Yes.

Does He save us from ourselves and from sin and from hell? Absolutely!

But He does all those things to bring us to God, He does all those things to make it possible for us to see God, to fellowship with God, to enjoy God forever.

Isaiah chapter 40 verse 1 talks about the Gospel, it says get you up to a high mountain, so go up where its high where you can speak and be heard, Go on up to a high mountain O Zion, herald of good news, herald of the Gospel, lift up your voice with strength, shout it out across the mountain. Oh Jerusalem, herald of good news lift it up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah.... And what is this message, what is this pronouncement, what is this herald supposed to say when he stands on top of the mountain, "Behold your God!" That's the message of the Gospel because God is the Gospel. [Isaiah 40:1](#) God is what makes the good news good, God is the final and highest gift that makes the good news so good and until people use to Gospel to get to God they use it wrongly.

We must see the Gospel like the Apostle Paul did, [Philippians 3:8](#) the Apostle Paul says, Indeed, I count everything is loss, everything as loss, nothing, it's worthless to me because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Or we must see the Gospel like the psalmist David, [Psalm 27:4](#), the psalmist raises up his voice and he says, One thing...

Now you know that story that we read about as children maybe you didn't read about it but you know about the bottle that you rub and the genie comes out and says, You have one wish or maybe 3 wishes, what will it be? Well here the psalmist David says I've got one wish, I've got one thing that I want above everything else, if I've just one thing I'll be happy. What

is it? [Psalm 27:4](#), One thing have I asked of the Lord and that will I seek after, I'm going to pursue this one thing. What does he want? He says that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, why did he want to do that why did he want to live in the house of the Lord? To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in his temple.

That is what the psalmist David wanted more than anything.

God himself is the Gospel.

Now the problem is we tend to want the benefit of the Gospel without the God of the Gospel, we want what the Gospel does for us, we are selfish, we're kind of glad to drive this bargain with God, we say okay God so that I can receive salvation from sin, hell, suffering, death, so that I can receive eternal life so if you will save me from hell and get me out of the pickle that I have created for myself then I will believe in you. We might even say, Well you know I'll even do some good things for you just to show you how much I appreciate what you've done for me.

Wow, is this not a good thing, look at what God is doing for me!

[Psalm 70:4](#), May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you, not glad in ourselves but glad in God, May those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!"

Not look at me I'm great, no, no, God is great.

We must rejoice in God and here we find part of our answer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question, Why do we need the Gospel?

Well if the answer to the first question "What is the Gospel" if the answer to that question is God is the Gospel then the answer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question is "Why do we need the Gospel" is because we're not God, we need the Gospel of God because we're not God.

[Romans 12:2](#) says: Do not be conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Now I used to hear that verse and I used to squirm and it used to make me uncomfortable, I used to dread it because that verse was often used to try to enforce or try to urge separation from the world and that's what that verse says but what this verse really says if the only way we can know and do what is truly good, what is truly acceptable, what is truly perfect is if we know the will of God. It is the only way that we're going to do this.

In other words we're not thinking straight about life, our default setting is the way the world thinks and this is the way that leads to destruction and to death, the only way we can think straight, the only way we can go a different path is if there is transformation that takes place, transformation of the heart through the mind.

Now our problem is that we are powerless to do this work of transformation, we don't do this, and if we try to do [Romans 12:2](#) in our own strength we will fail miserably, we will fail time and time and time again.

Jesus talks about this in John chapter 3, probably one of the best passages that talks directly about the Gospel, we know [John 3:16](#) we know it by memory for God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We know that. But if we look further back in that passage we see that verse immediately follows this dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus and Jesus talks here about transformation the need that Nicodemus had.

Nicodemus is one of those people that if anybody didn't need transformation it was him, I mean he was a ruler of the Jews, he was a man who was important, he was a man he was looked up to, a man who had it all together in terms of regulations in terms of trying to please God but he came to Jesus by night and said, I don't get it, I don't understand. And Jesus answered him: Truly, truly I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And Nicodemus still didn't understand.

And Jesus talks about this spiritual birth and He likened it to a physical birth. How many of you, and this is not a trick question, how many of you had anything to do with your first birth in terms of causing it, anybody here, I'm talking about your natural birth, anybody have any choice in the matter in terms of saying hey you know what I think I want to be born. No, it doesn't work that way and Jesus says it is the same with the spiritual birth, you must be born again and Nicodemus is like, okay, but how do I do this?

Jesus says the wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes and so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit, [John 3:8](#). There is something about this that is very mysterious, we do not understand it, we don't really even under-

stand a natural birth, of course scientists and doctors can explain it to you but it is still a miracle, our spiritual birth is much the same.

But the point of the matter is that we must be born again, our natural physical carnal existence is not going to do it, it is not going to get it done, we need transformation, we need to be somebody new, we need to be born again. There is no other way.

We also are told in this passage that we are to look to Christ, And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. [John 3:14-15](#).

So here God is the Gospel. And in verse 19, this is the judgement: that light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil, [John 3:19](#).

So now we switch gears a little bit and Jesus is using the imagery of light to talk about this power of transformation, there is a passage that is very parallel to this I would like you to turn there, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3, it picks up this theme of light and transformation at the end of chapter 3 and through chapter 4, you see we are powerless to do this work of transformation, God must transform us but how does He do this?, How this is transformation take place??

We've already alluded to it in [Isaiah 40:1](#), Behold your God.

By beholding the glory of God we become transformed. Look what it says here in [2 Corinthians 3:18](#): And we all, with an veiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So there is this transformation that comes when we look to God, when we glory in the glory of God.

Now we understand how this works just not on a spiritual level, you see we all have heroes and some people really get into this hero worship, if you admire someone enough you will eventually be changed into that person's image in some way, you will become like what you admire and who you admire.

So do you want to be transformed? Look at Christ, study him, delight in him.

You say oh well that's too hard work that's not practical.

Yes it is, it is not hard for us to study that which we admire, we do it all the time, just listen to the conversations around you throughout the week, what are people talking about, who are they looking up to? Often in our culture it is how is my favourite team doing or what are the stats on my favourite player and people will rattle off all the statistics, all this information they study it all the time!

Behold the glory of God to be transformed into the image of God, that's the message of Romans 8 where it says that we are being transformed, we are being changed into the image of Jesus Christ. That is what God is doing in our experience if we know him if we love him.

God works all things together for the good for those who are called according to his purpose, [Romans 8:28](#), and He is conforming us to the image of his dear Son.

That is what it's all about, that is what this transformation is all about but you see the god of this world has blinded our minds it says that in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 4 as we move down further in this passage it says about these unbelievers who have this veil and it says in verse 3 it is veiled only to those who are perishing, 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 Corinthians 4:3-4](#).

So what does the devil want to do if he is going to thwart this transformation this power of God what is he going to do? He is going to blind you to the life of the glory of God so that you cannot see.

The god of this world has blinded our mind in our natural state so that we can't even see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and God must work to remove that blindness, God must act, God must undertake that for us. If we're going to change if we're going to see God then we need that glory we must have that light to shine in our hearts and this is the supernatural work of God it is the work for which we can take no credit just as we can take no credit for being born.

Also in Romans chapter 12 notice it says that this transformation requires a change of mind, it requires a renewal of the mind. Now the biblical terminology here is repentance that's what it means to change your mind, you repent, you change your mind about it, and this change involves the surrender of ourselves as a little god, a little g god, it involves a surrender of

ourselves it is also surrender to God, the big G God, we must agree with God. The biblical language is confess, we must agree with God, we must confess that we are not the ruler of our lives, God is.

We must confess, we must agree with God that we are sinful and rebellious creatures we must trust in him and rely on him as Lord and Master of our lives.

That's what we're talking about we're talking about a change of mind.

Now we often wring our hands over the fact, or the seeming fact, that there are many people who profess to be saved and yet they do not seem to be living a holy life and we say, oh my what do we do about this?, Well perhaps, just perhaps we have been pointing them to the benefits of the Gospel rather than the God of the Gospel.

We want the salvation, we want the peace, we want the satisfaction but we don't really want God, we don't long to see the glory of God, we still want our own glory we have not surrendered, we haven't fully changed our mind. If that's the case we will not know transformation, we will not live a life that is any different from the life of him who is conformed to this world.

Perhaps another problem is that we know and believe the facts of the Gospel but we haven't yet surrendered to the God of the Gospel.

It does not take a supernatural work of God to believe the facts of the Gospel, the devils believe and tremble, it doesn't take a supernatural work to believe the facts, it does take a supernatural work of God to long for God, to delight in God, to delight in the person of God and seek for him and his glory. That takes a supernatural work.

Sometimes we settle for far too little, sometimes we believe that the facts of the Gospel will save us when in fact it is only the God of the Gospel who can save us.

We wonder why holiness is so elusive and we know because [Hebrews 12:14](#) tells us to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

We know that if we don't have holiness in our lives we're not going to see God, we know that but my fear is that many of us don't really want to see God and that is our problem all along, we want the Gospel for what it does for us but we don't really want to see God.

Do we really long to see the Lord as the psalmist wrote about as we already talked about, is that our single greatest motivation? To see God, to enjoy God, to live in God's presence to delight in him forevermore? Do we long for the day when we will see him in all his glory, not through a glass darkly like we see now, but face-to-face, do we long for that day?

When we read the word of God what are we looking for?

When you have your daily devotions what are you after?

Do you seek some formula for how to live a better life or are we looking for the glory of God for the revelation of God as a person?

Are we longing to know more of the character and excellence of God through his word? Or are we just doing our religious duty so we can chop that of our list for the day.

What about the things that we listen to or watch and read? What are we drawn to, what are we attracted to? Are we drawn to that which helps us to see more clearly the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Or are we drawn to that which feeds our flesh and our carnal desires?

And this goes both ways because what it is we feed on remember, what it is that we behold, what it is that we look at and long for transforms us or changes us.

So if you are not looking at Jesus Christ if you are not beholding the glory of God and instead you are beholding and watching and listening and reading and filling your mind with the things of the world guess what kind of life you are going to have? It's not that hard to figure out. Transformation only comes when we behold the glory of the Lord our God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Who are we fooling, who do we think we are fooling?

As we look at Him we begin to see ourselves as we really are, as we see the glory of a perfect spotless sinless God we see ourselves as we really are, we see the wretchedness, we see the terrible rebellion in our own hearts, we see our sin as it really is, this happens when we behold the glory of God when we seek the face of Christ.

Now this is not a good feeling, it doesn't make us feel good, we've got this bad idea, this wrong idea that the Gospel is all about making me feel good, it is not, it has to make you feel terrible before it can ever make you feel good. And so we throw ourselves on the mercy and grace of God a God

who is the Gospel, the God who can and does empower us to live in victory, victory over sin, not for our own sake but for his sake, for his glory.

So how do you know whether or not you believe the real Gospel?

Maybe a good question to ask yourself is, Would you be happy in heaven if Christ wasn't there, do you think you could be happy in heaven, a perfect place with no sickness, with all the friends you ever had here on earth, only the good friends, all the food you ever enjoyed that you liked to eat, all the leisure and entertainment activities that you've ever enjoyed, all the natural beauty that you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you've ever experienced, no human conflict, no natural disasters, could you be satisfied with that kind of heaven without Christ there?

If your answer to that question is yes you do not believe the real Gospel.

A writer by the name of J C Ryle wrote this many years ago and I think it is just as true now as it was then he says:

“Alas how little fit for heaven are many who talk of going to heaven when they die while they manifestly have no saving faith, no real acquaintance with Christ. You give Christ no honour here, you have no communion with him, you do not love him, alas what could you do in heaven?

It would be no place for you, it's joys would be no joy for you, it's happiness would be a happiness into which you could not enter, it's employments or work would be a weariness and a burden to your heart.

Oh repent and change before it is too late!”

If you think that you could enjoy heaven and Christ not be there you are seriously mistaken. What you need to do is to behold your God.

Let's pray.

Our Father God we thank you that you are the Gospel, that you are the good news, that you are the ultimate good news, we thank you that you have entered our world not only to create it sustain it but also to save it and to save us. We thank you that this salvation opens up a way for us to commune with you, to see you, to enjoy your goodness and your glory.

Help us to never take these blessings and these benefits that you have given us and spend them only for ourselves but help us to see you in all these things.

May we behold your glory in the face of Jesus Christ and be transformed from one glory to another and another.

God I just pray that you would do this work among us, that you would do this supernatural work of bringing the light to shine, of taking the blinders off, creating new life, renewing minds and hearts, transforming us into the image of your dear son Jesus Christ in whose name we pray.

Amen



## SHINING LIGHTS

Darkness Is The Absence Of Light.

This may seem a self-evident statement as we all know that when there is no light there is darkness but as we ponder on that statement and read through Scripture the statement “darkness is the absence of light” has both natural and spiritual implications.

We all understand that the absence of light allows darkness to prevail in the natural world however this morning we would like to look a little more closely at what Scripture has to say about the Light that is Christ thus the title Shining Lights

So let’s start with **In the beginning**, as we do with all things, [Genesis 1:1-4<sup>\(KJV\)</sup>](#) In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. <sup>2</sup> And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided or separated the light from the darkness.

This word darkness in verse 2 comes from a Hebrew word “kho-shek” and literally means the dark or darkness and it is figurative of misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow and wickedness and spiritually that is the state of the world without God. I am inclined to think that this darkness in verse 2 was an existing state of affairs before creation, Scripture does not tell us that God created darkness.

The word light in verses 3 and 4 comes from a Hebrew word that means illumination and isn’t that what Christ does and is? He illuminates or lights the pathway to the restoration of our fellowship with God as Adam and

Eve had in the beginning and sadly destroyed because of their misplaced desire as we read in verse 6 Genesis chapter 1

Scripture often speaks of light and generally speaks of it in the context of being provided by God, He after all commanded it into being at creation, Scripture also represents God as Light, it also speaks of that light when it is dwelling in the righteous people as being a sign of God's presence and furthermore that we should not hide it, Scripture also makes it plain that God will take away His light from the unrighteous, He will put it out as it tells us in, [Job 18:5](#), Yea the light of the wicked shall be put out and again in [Proverbs 13:9](#) it says the light of the righteous rejoices **but** the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.

Christ, the Word, is identified as the light, we find that in the gospel of [John 1:1-9](#) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> The same was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life; and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. <sup>9</sup> *That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

I believe we are all agreed that when it speaks here of the Word and the Light in capitals it is speaking of Jesus Christ.

Simeon prophesied over the child Jesus when He was brought into the temple by his parents and this is what he Simeon said, [Luke 2:28-32](#) Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, <sup>29</sup> Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: <sup>30</sup> For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, <sup>31</sup> Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; <sup>32</sup> A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. We also find in the gospel of John Jesus referring to Himself a number of times as being the Light.

Thus far we have focused on establishing from Scripture that Jesus is the Light and now let's turn to Philippians 2 to see how it applies to us.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians he expressed his affection and gratitude for their willingness to walk in the ways of Christ, he is very much interested and invested in seeing them grow spiritually and here he exhorts them in respect to their Christian life and character, in verses 1 through 4 we see Paul's desire is for them to dwell in unity and humility and forgetting their own desires but rather to care for others, I believe that Paul's words are meant for us today just as much as they were for the believers of his time, the words of [2 Timothy 3:16](#) would bear that out it says all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

In [Philippians 2:5](#) he encourages them to seek the mind of Christ, in other words encouraging them to seek out how Christ would want them to live as His disciples in other words a personal relationship with Christ.

In Philippians 2 Paul is instructing the fellowship at Philippi and us today as has already been stated, and we will use a couple of those verses to briefly focus how we are to be that light Jesus tells us we are, how we need to be shining lights, not so much for our own benefit, and certainly not for our glorification, but for the glory of God so that others may be drawn to the Light that is Jesus Christ and have a desire awoken in their hearts to be called out of darkness into His marvellous light.

He continues in [Philippians 2:12-16](#) Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup> For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. <sup>14</sup> Do all things without murmurings and disputings: <sup>15</sup> That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; <sup>16</sup> Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

In these verses we see Paul's encouragement to work out our own salvation, I believe that Paul is saying to us that our salvation is personal something that should be able to be seen by others and for that we need light, not just any light but the Light of Christ that shines brightly, it is not just an inward experience but involves an outward expression of our renewed mind and life in Christ which [Romans 12:2](#) tells us how to achieve, we are

not to be conformed to the world, the way non-believers live, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind so that we can prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Verse 13 (Philippians 2) portrays God's work, there is a spiritual renewing and indwelling of the Spirit which works in us, it says it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Verse 14 (Philippians 2) instructs us to do these things and be content in doing them without murmuring and disputing, strife is forbidden and that is really difficult for many at times as it often goes against our carnal nature.

Paul's words speaks of an outward expression of our faith, one that is visible to the world in which we live, ungodly as it may be, and I believe that is another way of saying that we should let the Light of Christ shine forth from our lives. One cannot be a disciple or follower of someone without displaying or living out the example of the one being followed in the case of believers that One is Jesus Christ.

It reminds me of Jesus' words in Gethsemane to His heavenly Father – not my will but Thine be done – that attitude must be ours too I believe if we are to be the shining lights that Christ calls us to be.

In [Proverbs 20:27](#) the wise man, commonly acknowledged to be Solomon, tells us that the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, and like all candles it is capable of being an instrument of light only when it is lit

By nature, or we could say in our own strength, we are like so many lamps and candles, each of these have a wick (in today's world of electric globes these are called filaments) that when lit by an outside source it gives light but until that happens it is cold and dark, and so we are not able to shed forth any light that the Scripture calls us to until our nature, our inner man is lit or kindled by that outside source which is Light of Christ. And what is that Light? Jesus himself said in [John 8:12](#) I am the light of the world, he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life and a little further on in John 11 verse 10 Jesus speaks about the man that walks in the night or darkness, that he will stumble because there is no light in him.

I believe that Jesus speaking of this light is talking about His indwelling presence through the Holy Spirit.

A question: Has the candle, the lamp, of your life been lit by contact with Christ, the Sun of righteousness and furthermore are you allowing Him to trim your light through trials and tribulations and adversity so that it will continue to burn bright? Or are you just a dim glow?

Our Lord tells us in Matthew chapter 5 to let your light shine before men, let's just read some verses there; [Matthew 5:14-16](#) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. It is very obvious from these verses that Jesus not only wants us but actually commands us to let our light shine and shows us how ridiculous it would be to hide that light, there would be little point if we were to light a candle or a lamp and then cover it over but I wonder how many times we have placed something over our light maybe by uncharitable speech or ill temper or by being discontented or grumbling about our circumstances.

Without the Light of Christ we are like a torch without batteries – useless.

I know that I have not always allowed the light of Christ to shine in my life for the benefit of others and besides those things I just mentioned I am sure that there are other areas that we can all recall where we hid our light under a bushel so to speak and perhaps even came close to extinguishing it.

It is not up to us to ignite the light or to supply the oil but rather to be willing to allow God to do that through his Holy Spirit.

Our part is in keeping our lamps, our way of life in Christ, clean and bright and to guard against any thing that may obstruct the outward shining light of the Love and Life of God through our soul. A lighthouse with shutters over its light is useless, what are the shutters in my life that keep the light of Christ shining out if indeed we profess to have it within?

God's overall purposes will be fulfilled whether we cooperate or not, Scripture is clear on that, our part as believers is to make sure that anything which might hinder or effect our testimony or mar our influence is put away and then Christ will see to it that our light shall have an effect on others in accordance with His purposes or good pleasure as verse 13 in Philippians 2 states. [Isaiah 55:11](#) and [Romans 8:28](#) also bear this out that

God's purposes will be fulfilled and no-one is able to thwart the will of God.

[Isaiah 55:11](#) says: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. And then we have this in [Romans 8:28](#), And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. This verse is speaking to us believers and seems to echo the words in Isaiah 55, which is God speaking,

It says that with certainty we can or should know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose and Scripture tells us in Matthew 5 that one of His purposes is for us to let our light shine before men so that they will glorify our Father in heaven.

Light is indeed a marvellous thing without it we could do very little but let us also consider ourselves to be that stand or candlestick on which that candle is placed and burning to provide light to others, that is what God calls us to be and Paul reminds us [in 2 Corinthians 6:16](#) that you as a believer are the temple of the living God and God has said, I will dwell in them and walk in them and I will be their God and they shall be my people,

God is the Master of the house in which we dwell, He decides where we shall be placed and it may very well be a very small dark corner, on a very humble stand but some day as He passes by you in the form of that hungry or thirsty stranger, that destitute person, that sick person or that person in prison that Christ mentions in [Matthew 25:43](#), and as that person, also made in the image of God, passes by you, we are to light their footsteps so that the light of Christ within us may go forth to bring the message of salvation to those who are lost as we ourselves once were.

Do you know, do I know what or where my stand is, what my place is in society, my place in the home, my situation in some business house or factory or school wherever it may be, do I recognise it as the place where God wants me to be and wherever it is it doesn't matter so long as our light, His indwelling light, is shining forth, steady and clear as a warning and direction to men and women on the pathway or journey of life that Christ will

not only show to us but to them as they see His Light shining forth from our lives.

Remember the words of the Psalmist in [Psalm 16:11](#) that it is God who will do the directing it says: Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence *is* fullness of joy; at Thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore. We have also the words of the Lord given to the prophet Isaiah as an instruction to His people Israel, words which I believe apply to us today with perhaps even greater urgency than ever. [Isaiah 60:1-3](#) <sup>(ESV)</sup> Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. <sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Horatio Bonar expressed it well when he wrote:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say I am this dark world’s Light  
Look unto Me thy morn shall rise and all thy day be bright!”  
Our answer is to be found in the next 2 lines of this hymn:  
“I looked to Jesus and I found in Him my Star, my Sun  
And in that Light of life I’ll walk till all my journey’s done.”

In his letter to the [Ephesians 5:20:15-17](#) and verse 20, Paul reminds his readers that they and we are to “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Verse 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In closing I would like to offer some words for reflection and of encouragement and for those who desire to think more on the light that is Christ may I encourage you to seek out the many, many references in Psalms to light most of which are a reference to God. Some time ago I came across the following poem which encouraged me to do what it says – rest and pray in the midst of my day which can be busy at times.

Notice the references to darkness and light in this poem whose author is unknown:

### Rest and Pray

When skies grow dark, as they sometimes will;  
And the road is rough and leads uphill;  
And the load gets heavy along the way,  
Just stop a moment to rest and pray.

When strength is failing, and it would seem  
That thru the clouds there is scarce a gleam  
To light your feet o'er the rugged way,  
Just stop a moment to rest and pray.

When things go wrong, as they oft will do;  
When cares are many and joys are few,  
Remember that Christ, too, came this way;  
Then stop a moment to rest and pray.

When all is darkness within and without,  
And the path obscured by mists of doubt,  
It will grow brighter from day to day  
If you stop a moment to rest and pray.

Do others meet with success, while you  
Seem just a failure in all you do?  
The Light of the World will show the way  
If you stop a moment to rest and pray.

In Numbers chapter 6 we have this God ordained blessing on the people of Israel and I believe it is for us today as well we being the spiritual Israel of God as portrayed in [Ephesians 2:10-13<sup>\(ESV\)</sup>](#) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. <sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

And now the blessing from God in [Numbers 6:22-27](#)<sup>(ESV)</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>23</sup> “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, <sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. <sup>27</sup> “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Oswald Chambers said: The most precarious thing is to try and live without God. If we are born again it is the easiest thing to live in right relationship to God and the most difficult thing to go wrong but only **IF** we will heed God’s warning and keep in the Light.

It has also been said that a willing volunteer is worth ten pressed men, Jesus does not compel people to follow Him, His call is to those who are willing to volunteer to be His disciples when He says, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

To let the Light of Christ shine forth we need to be those who volunteer and answer that call to follow.

May each of us be that light that Christ wants us and calls us to be so that we shine forth in an ever darkening world that is coming to its prophesied end, our personal journey with Christ in this life may well be over before that end comes and may this God ordered and spoken blessing to Israel of old be as valid for us today, the new and spiritual Israel. *J. v. L.*



## IS HOLINESS IMPORTANT?

YES! – God Requires It.

We would like to share a few observations on the need for holiness starting with this instructive warning from Hebrews 12:14 – Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Some comments by godly men of old:

*John Wesley* said this about holiness – not following after holiness is the direct way to fall into sin of every kind.

*Adam Clarke* in his commentary on this verse says about holiness that is is a state of continual sanctification, that life of purity and detachment from the world and all its lusts, without which detachment and sanctity no man shall see the Lord - shall never enjoy his presence in the world of blessedness. To see God, in the Hebrew phrase, is to enjoy him; and without holiness of heart and life this is impossible. No soul can be fit for heaven that has not suitable dispositions for the place.

Please turn to Colossians 3:1-17 <sup>(ESV)</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. <sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Our message title asks "Is Holiness Important?" and Yes, it is!

Here are a few pointers: We live in a permissive age, to many people nothing really matters and they do as they please, thinking that in the end it will work out somehow. It is called complacency.

In the Old Testament there was a time when everyone did what was right in his own eyes; (Judges 17:6, 21:25) we see a repeat of that in our day. People leave God out of the picture. Already in the Old Testament God made a difference between clean and unclean, holy and unholy, and He has not changed. In 1 Peter 1:16 God says, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

Our key verse from Hebrews 12:14 that we read at the outset implies that without holy living we will not get to Heaven, and nobody wants to miss going there.

So what is holiness? It refers to being set apart from sin. The Bible declares that all are sinners, separated and alienated from God and continuing in that state throughout life. God is calling all mankind to come out of this world of sin, and through Christ He provides grace for us to be reconciled to Him. Thus holiness can be considered a response to the grace of God. When we repent and confess our sins, the blood of Christ makes us holy and clean, and we are set apart for His service.

1 Peter 1:15 says, “But as he which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation”; that is, our behaviour our walk of life. This includes our thoughts, speech, attitudes, and social or business dealings. It means conquering sins of the spirit such as bitterness, anger, jealousy, and evil speaking, as well as the works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21. Read

Praise God, we can overcome all these by the blood of Jesus Christ. Remember, without holiness we will not get to Heaven. So holiness is important indeed so important in fact that our eternal destiny depends on it. Holiness is wholeness—the whole of Christ in the whole of life.

The written word of God, the Bible, is our roadmap, a blueprint if you will, where we can discern the way to holiness, Isaiah speaks of that way of holiness which allows us to joyfully flourish not only in Christ’s kingdom but to help that kingdom to flourish and draw others, read chapter 35 of Isaiah at your leisure taking time to ponder on the call and encouragement given there by Isaiah as he was led by the Lord to speak those words and note especially verse 8, Isaiah 35:8 <sup>(ESV)</sup> “And a highway shall be there, and it

shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.”

What a blessing and a privilege to have the word of God to guide us onto the way of holiness unto which we are called, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, and may we indeed have the words of Hebrews 12:14 <sup>(Amplified Version)</sup> always before us, strive to live in peace with everybody and pursue that consecration and holiness without which no one will ever see the Lord.”

### My Old Bible

— *anonymous*

Though the cover is worn,  
And the pages are torn,  
And though places bear traces of tears;  
Yet more precious than Gold  
Is the Book, worn and old,  
That can scatter and shatter our fears.

This old Book is my guide,  
‘Tis a friend by my side,  
It will lighten and brighten my way;  
And each promise I find  
Soothes and gladdens my mind  
As I read it and heed it each day.

To this Book I will cling,  
Of its worth I will sing,  
Though great losses and crosses be mine;  
For I cannot despair,  
Though surrounded by care,  
While possessing this blessing divine.

Let us pass on that love and reverence for God’s to our families and friends



Thy word *is* A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH.

*Lord, I Need You!*

*Strength, Lord, I need your Strength,  
To help me rise each day,  
To do each duty and each task,  
Which comes along my way.*

*Help, Lord, I need your help,  
When difficulties come,  
To have peace within my heart,  
And say, Thy will be done.*

*Power, Lord, I need your power,  
When Satan tempts me sore,  
To say, "Get thee behind me now."  
And thus to win the war.*

*Prayer, Lord, help me to pray,  
"Your will is best for me"  
When I don't fully understand,  
Let me submissive be.*

*Home, Lord, yes take, me home.  
How blessed that will be,  
To be with Christ my Savior dear  
For all eternity!*

*by Jewel Wenger*

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