

Christians in the Spotlight

Our Personal Witness

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Given 04-Oct-03; Tape #633

Imagine that everyone in the world—everyone—each man, woman, and child—became infected with an air-borne virus. The disease that this virus causes was not immediately fatal. In fact, it is known to take many years—even a life-time—to prove deadly.

This illness rarely causes a person's flesh to become diseased. But, it particularly targets the mental state, and subsequently, speech and behavior.

However, a cure for this disease is discovered in some ancient writings. It is found to be quite effective.

There are a couple of factors that make the cure undesirable to most people.

The first factor is that for the cure to work, an infected person has to dedicate himself to a rather strict regime of mental and physical exercise.

The second factor—and this is the kicker for most—is that its main side-effect causes the recovering patient to glow like a light bulb!

Now, what I have just given you, as you have probably figured out, is a parable of sorts. It is not very difficult to interpret this parable.

The airborne virus is the spirit of Satan in this world in rebellion against God. It causes, of course, thoughts, speech, and behavior to bring slow destruction and death upon the whole world.

The cure, of course, that is found in God's Word—ancient writings—is repentance, acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, and belief in God. All of these things require a great deal of study, prayer, thought, and experiential living.

Not only does the disease last a whole lifetime, the cure must also last the whole lifetime.

And, the side-effect is that compared to the rest of humanity who are still infected, (true) Christians stand out like the proverbial sore thumb. That is how we glow.

Since this is the last Sabbath before the Feast of Tabernacles, I thought it would be appropriate to remind us of our duty as Christians to be lights in the world. To really enjoy the glow as it were.

As lights in the world, we represent God wherever we are, and in whatever we are doing. We ought to think about this, especially at the Feast of Tabernacles where we have such a great exposure to the world.

I may also add, that many of those people who we will be coming in contact with know why we are there. At least, in a superficial way—they know we are members of a church.

We will be reading verses 1 through 4 of John 1, then dropping down to verse 9, and then we will go on to a few other scriptures in the book of John. But, I thought that this would be a good place to start. We might as well begin at the source. It is always a good place to start at the beginning.

John 1:1-4, 9 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men? That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

To me, I think that that verse is wrongly translated. Maybe it would be better to say, "the true Light was He who coming into the world enlightening every man." I believe that they put the "who comes into the world" in the wrong place. It really describes Jesus coming into the world, not men coming into the world.

In several places in the book of John, especially, it talks about Jesus Christ coming into the world as if from outside the world, which is exactly what happened. And this word "world" is "cosmos"—a world that is apart from God in rebellion against God. This is showing that Jesus came from outside that system into the system in order to enlighten it, to shine upon it, and to give it the knowledge and understanding that it needed for salvation.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

This is the context of the man being healed who was blind from birth:

John 9:4-5 I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

All these verses have to do with Jesus being the light of the world. He is personifying light. Being the light of men. Being the true light.

This can be taken to mean that Jesus Christ is the Revelator, the One who reveals what is true and good, and right, as opposed to that which is false, and evil, and wrong.

It can also be understood to mean that He is a guide, like a lamp, or flashlight in a dark night to go outside through the woods for some reason. It is awfully nice to have some sort of illumination so that while you are going down through the woods, you do not trip over something.

It is far more likely that if you have a light in your hand, and you can illuminate your path in front of you, you can avoid being tripped up and falling flat on your face, and getting hurt. And, Jesus is the One that provides the light for us to see the path ahead.

In Psalm 119, it also speaks of God's Word, or the Commandments being a lamp unto our feet. This is the same idea.

The light can also imply, or suggest to us an example, a model, or a pattern to follow. This one is not as obvious at first, but a light can reveal something, and what is revealed, then, is the model that we are supposed to follow. Jesus certainly does that!

We also saw coming through these verses in John, that there is a connection between light and life. It says that in Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And in chapter 8 it said that He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

There is this connection that following the light leads to life.

It is interesting that some people talk about having these near-death experiences, and in them, they often are supposed to follow the light to some sort of after-life.

Well, this is the Real One. This is how it really happens. We follow the light while we are living. And then, that leads to eternal life, not some death-bed sort of experience where we grope along some dark tunnel toward some speck of light in the distance.

No, when all these things need to happen are while we are alive and able to make these decisions, and continue in them. We need to prove to God that we are indeed following them and that we are hooked up with Him. We need to prove that we are on the same wave-length with Him, that we are willing to submit to Him, and do whatever it takes to please Him, and glorify Him.

Just as the Son of God is the source of light, He is also the source of life, which is another way to look at this. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." It is not just life, but eternal life we are talking about here. And, not just ever lasting life, or life that goes on forever, but life, in John's context is life as God lives life. It is talking quality of life, not length.

So, if we follow the light—which is Jesus Christ, not only obey Him, but also mimic Him, and use Him for a pattern, and as a guide—then the end result of that is life.

We should not forget to mention that light has a couple of other symbolic meanings.

For instance in a series I went through quite a bit this past spring and summer is that light symbolizes glory, splendor, divinity, and even God's presence. It also has a suggestion of purity. We talk about white light being a pure form of light. It has the underlying idea of being without any sort of darkness what so ever—being pure, and undefiled. All these things come into this understanding of light as personified by Jesus Christ.

The sense I will mostly use today is light as a model—an example, a pattern, a guide. Maybe the best way to put it might be as a witness—something that shines bright that cannot be avoided, or ignored—it is something there, right out in front to show, to prove, to make a witness of the right and true way of living.

Of course, Jesus provides that to us in the Gospels. We are told time and time again that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

We have Him as an example, and as the source of light, and as our light, that is the One we

follow, because He set the proper example.

We are going to start in John 3:17, just after the most famous "Protestant" verse in the Bible.

John 3:17-21 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

What we see here, something that we can pull out of this section, this passage, is that Jesus' own witness is a timeless, universal example to the whole world—to everyone.

It is especially vivid against the backdrop of a condemned world. It stands out in such stark relief compared to the way of the world, which has, as Jesus argues here, condemned itself.

It says that he who does not believe is condemned already. And, it is because of their own deeds that they loved darkness rather than light. They have condemned themselves to this awful existence in the dark, in ignorance, and in various shades of sin from small things like "white" lies, all the way to the most perverted things that one could imagine (or should not imagine), to rank idolatry. It includes terrible murders like the Holocaust and things that happened in Russia under Stalin and the genocide in Rwanda.

The whole world has condemned itself in sin. It desires to stay in darkness.

This passage said that the true light is shining. But because of man's evil inclinations and behaviors, most of the people of this earth (though they know the light is shining, and is there in God's word to be studied) just simply reject it out of hand.

Why?

They do not want the light to expose their black hearts. That is what the light does. When light shines in a dark place, evil—darkness—must disappear. What it reveals, then, is the source of the evil. They do not like being exposed.

What do people do when they have been caught by the police, and have to pass in front of some television camera? They hide their faces. They do not want to be exposed as a criminal.

Jesus says that the light reveals these things in stark contrast. And most of the world has put the hood over their heads and covered themselves up, because they do not want their evil deeds exposed.

But, there are some (and that is what it gets to toward the end of this passage) who truly desire to come to the light. Those, of course, are the ones God has personally picked out as we see in

chapter 6, verse 44. He calls them specifically and draws them to Him. In fact this word here in verse 21 where it said, "comes to the light?" it also has the nuance of being drawn. We can say then that he who does the truth is drawn to the light.

It is interesting—these words in verses 20 and 21—the first word in the New King James is "practicing." I think that in the Old King James it is "does," or "doeth." These are from a similar word that is rendered "does" in verse 21. But, they are not the same.

The word in verse 20, "everyone practicing evil," has the sense of continuity. You could say, "everyone pursuing evil," or "living in evil," or "continuing to do evil." Such people do not want to come to the light. They, in fact, hate the light.

But, in verse 21, the word "does" there does not imply continuity. It implies accomplishment. It implies something having been done, something having been completed.

If you want a paraphrase of that, it would be, "but he who accomplishes the truth?" It gives the sense of somebody who has set his heart on it, and has already begun to do what is right. It almost even suggests a past action where there is proof of one's desire to do what is good and right. This type of person, then, comes to the light.

And the reasons for it are two-fold: 1) That their deeds may be clearly seen. There is a desire to show forth what is right and good. And, 2) That they have been done in God. The desire is to glorify God, and point back to Him as the One who actually inspired these deeds to be done.

I have seen other translations (regarding this last point) render it that they have been done in obedience to God, or in submission to God. These things have been done for the right reasons to make a good witness before the world and to glorify God. These are the real reasons why we should show forth our good works.

One of the things that really popped out at me while studying this section was that Jesus almost always shows a sharp divide like a razor cut between opposites—right and wrong, good and evil, His own brethren and the enemy. There is no middle ground in these areas.

You can not exist in a shadowy area. You either have to be in darkness, or you must be in the light.

Martin had a sermon not too long ago about the gray areas. People often come back and say, "well, is not that a gray area?" Well, when you come down to it, there are few gray areas. There is God's way, and there is the wrong way.

I mentioned that there are a few gray areas. The reason why is that the Bible does not specifically nail down everything. But, normally we could come up with a principle to show where those things lie, either in the light, or in the darkness. There may be a few things where we might say, "well, we are not exactly sure, but?" this is the way we should approach it.

However, that does not give us an excuse.

If we continue in these things and do what is right, God usually shows us by the fruits of it whether it is right (light), or wrong (darkness).

I would rather not prove it that way. I would rather have the answer right away, but sometimes

it happens that way. That is why we should look back upon the experiences, not only in the Bible, but also others' experiences like Mr. Armstrong, and others in the church. Those experiences give us a good clue about how we should look at some of these matters whether they are in the light, or the darkness. It ends up, that the gray areas are few and very far between.

Really, once we come to understand things, there are no gray areas.

It is just a matter of a lack of understanding until then. Something may fall into a "short" place for us for a while.

Jesus does not allow a gray area in the way that He sets these things out. There is always a sharp divide on these things.

Either you are with Him, or you are against Him. You are either going into the Kingdom, or you are not. There is no purgatory.

I John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all

Here we have it again, poles apart way of describing these things. God is light, and there is no amount of darkness in Him at all. He is the pure, white, bright light.

I John 1:7 ?But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

This, obviously is a clear indication—not quite a command, but that is what it ends up being—that we are to follow in His footsteps in the light. Our walking in the light that shines from Him puts us on the same page with Him.

I want you to get this—if we are walking in the light, as He is in the light, we are side by side with Him. Can two walk together unless they be agreed (Amos 3:3)?

No. They must be in agreement.

So, if we are walking in the light as He is in the light, then we are in step with Him. That is pretty obvious.

And, we are also in step with all those others who are walking in the light. So, it is like this big chorus line. We are all arm in arm. We may not be kicking up our heels, but we are all standing, or walking forward with Christ. We are walking forward. We are all doing the same thing.

Now, it says toward the end of verse 7 that if we do this, walking in the light, we are in fellowship with Him and with the brethren, what does He do? He says that the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us from all sin.

What does that tell you?

If we are lock-step with Christ, and with our brethren, God is very willing, even eager to apply Christ's sacrifice to us. Why? In order to keep us in fellowship with Him and to continue the relationship with Him. This is how important it is to walk in the light.

If we are continuing to do what is right, to follow Jesus Christ, to make the most of our relationship, God is going to bend over backwards to keep us in the relationship with Him, and obviously with everybody else who is also walking with Him.

In this case He specifically talked about cleansing us from sin. But, what does the sacrifice do? The sacrifice makes us able to come before God. We are able to speak with Him in Prayer. We are able to ask Him for things. We are able to pray for our brethren. We are able to do so much because that curtain has been ripped open, and we are allowed to waltz right into the very throne room of God, and maintain our relationship with Him.

We need to continue to walk in the light, as He is in the light.

If you have heard the Bible study my dad has been giving about, "How much does God love us?", you will remember that He spends quite a bit of time talking about the word "as."

It applies just as appropriately here as it does in John 4: 17. If we walk in the light as He is in the light?

Just as—in the same way—as He is in the light, then these things are ours.

That is a pretty high standard!

I think of the Sabbath doctrine here. In this office, we are constantly reminded of the Sabbath in terms of the website, and the questions that we get off of the website. One of them that comes up frequently is, "if you do not keep the Sabbath, can you be saved?"

This verse answers that question. If you walk in the light as He is in the light, then you will have forgiveness of sin.

What is the Sabbath? It is the Fourth Commandment. If one breaks the Fourth Commandment it is sin. If one is not walking in the Sabbath like Jesus walked in the Sabbath, then there is no forgiveness of that sin.

People do not think that the Sabbath is important. But, it is the one day that God has set aside for us to be in fellowship with Him constantly. It is the day that we are supposed to be dedicating ourselves to learning how to walk in the light.

Now, it is not the only day that we do these things. It is not the only day that we are in fellowship with Him, but it is the one time that He has consecrated as holy time so that we can get rid of all the distractions of life (or as many as we possibly can), so that could be possible.

The Sabbath is very important. It is paramount to our salvation.

This is just one example of what it is that we have to do to walk in the light. Jesus kept the Sabbath. He gave us the example of how to walk according to that particular commandment. And so, if we want to be in fellowship with Him, and fellowship with our brethren, and have our sins forgiven, then we had better keep the Sabbath like He did!

That is not very hard to understand. You can do this with every other commandment, or every other principle. If we walk as Jesus walked, we will be in the same light that He is.

I would say that what we just went over there is a pretty good reason to walk in the light, so that we could have our sins forgiven, and remain in fellowship with Jesus Christ and our brethren.

Matthew 5:14-16 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We are switching gears here. I gave a sermon in May 2002 which I called, "Our Affinity to Christ," meaning, how much He and we are alike. I went through several of the commonalties between Christ and us—we are His brethren, we are first fruits, we are this and that. You might want to go back and listen to the sermon for all of those ideas. I dwelt at that time on the first fruits idea since it was given either on, or just before Pentecost.

Here is another one. Remember that we saw that He said that He was the light of the world. Now, this says that we are the light of the world. It is another occasion in which we, as His brethren mimic—follow or copy—Him.

I know how it is in my family. My older kids hate it when the little kids mimic them. Johnny might say something, and Jared might say the exact same thing right after him, and just keep copying him. Johnny says, "Quit copying me!"

Well, Jesus is not one of those older brother types that get irritated with that sort of thing. Jesus does not say, "Stop copying me!" but rather He says, "Keep on copying Me!"

He wants us to do it all of the time. That is how we become the light of the world, just like He is the light of the world.

Many people would say that light here that we have is reflected light. I would not argue with that. But, there is more to it than that. It begins, certainly, as reflected light. However, if you will notice in verse 16, He says, "Let your light?" And if you go down and follow His thought in verse 20, He says, "Your righteousness?"

There comes a point where these things are not just attributed to us. There comes a point where it must come from inside, whether you call it, "your light," or whether you call it, "your righteousness"—someday, it will be your glory that must come from you!

But, there is a point where you reach that time when it is less reflected light, and more internal light because you have put on all these attributes, because you have walked so long with Him in the light.

Remember Moses' face? He went up to the Mount and was facially normal. But he stayed up there forty days and forty nights, and he came down, and his face glowed because he had been in the presence of God. And, the people were afraid of him, and had told him, "Cover your face,

Moses. This scares us!"

We do not get that, literally. But, over a period of time, our light should shine from us because of our constant exposure to that source of light, Jesus Christ and God the Father.

As we grow, our light should grow brighter and brighter.

This comes just before that section about keeping your heart with all diligence for out of it springs forth the issues of life:

Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the just *is* like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

This gives me a pretty good indication that if you are one of the "just" you cannot stop with the reflected light. Your path has to be one that gets ever brighter until it gets to the point where you shine like the sun. This will literally happen in the resurrection. It does say that when we come up in the resurrection, we shall see Him as He is. We are going to be like Him.

This is the trajectory. We start with a great deal of reflected light from Jesus Christ, because God puts upon us, by a legal maneuver, Christ's righteousness. But, over time we have to make that our own. That is why Mr. Armstrong always talked about growing in holy, righteous character. This is the process that I have been talking about.

As I have said, once these things become internalized, once we show them in the world, we stick out like a sore thumb—we shine.

Jesus gives us actually two different examples of shining lights to give us some interesting instruction here.

First, He calls us, "a city on a hill." Now, the symbols of a city, and a hill in most of the Bible represent a nation, or a government.

And the church, who is the Bride of Christ, is likened to New Jerusalem coming out of Heaven, being the Headquarters of Christ, and God the Father, as we see there in Revelation 21.

I look at this—the city set on a hill—as the nation or government of God, set up on a hill, on an eminent place. It is set up just like there in Isaiah 2:2.

Isaiah 2:2 "Now it shall come to pass in the later days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it."

I think of this in particular—Isaiah 2:2—of being a government, yes, but also of being high in a place of eminence where people can see it, and flow up to it.

Right now on earth, the church is the representative nation of God. We are called a holy nation in I Peter 2, and He has set it up on an eminence so all the world can see it.

I have gone to this extent to say that this figure speaks, or shows the church's collective outward witness to the world. It is the people as a whole, as a group, that are set up where people in the world can see them. Not just where they can see one another, but the whole world can see the church as a collective whole, as the body of Christ, and get an example from it—can see the light from the church.

Now, the second one is a light that is in a lamp that is put on a lamp stand, and gives light unto the whole house.

To me, when you talk about lamps and lamp stands, the first things I think of are Zechariah 4 and Revelation 1. What are they talking about? They are talking about the church pretty much as a whole. Zechariah 4 shows a lamp stand; and Revelation 1 shows Christ in the midst of 7 lamp stands.

When we talk about house, a house is just a family; and certainly the church is the house of God, and Jesus is over this house. You see that in Hebrews 3:6 where it specifically says, "whose house we are?" meaning Christ's house, and He is over it.

Or, I Peter 4:17 where it says that judgment has come upon the house of God.

So, this illustration gives me the indication that it is more individual, and internal. It is talking about our personal example in using the metaphor of the house. It is specifically talking about our own families, and on a little bit broader scale, the church of God. Which is our expanded spiritual family.

Together, both the city set on a hill, which is an outward, collective witness to the world, and the lamp on the lamp stand in the house, shows our personal witness within the family, and within the church.

Together, both of these cover the entire spectrum of life: Our outside life and our inside life, our personal life and our public life, our church life and our work life, our life as part of the body of Christ, and our life as individuals.

In each one of these He gives the indication that the light is always on; it is always shining. No matter where we are, no matter who is observing, no matter what the circumstances, the switch is on.

We are never to turn it off. Our light is always shining. It is constant. It never goes off.

Another thing stressed here is that the light should never be covered—certainly it should not be off—but He also says that it cannot be hidden. He says that it should not be put under a basket. So, therefore, let your light so shine, like He says there in verse 16.

He wants the world to see our light. He is not ashamed of us, and we should not be ashamed of Him. He wants the world to witness our good works. He wants what we do to bring glory to the Father. He wants us always shining. There is never a moments rest, because it takes work to make light.

Did you ever get on one of those bikes that they hook up to a light bulb? You have to pedal to make the light come on. Do you understand how much work you have to do to make that light stay on? Do you know that as soon as you stop pedaling, that light goes out? The same thing

happens in our own personal witness, our own shining light.

You can go to sleep. That is not a problem. But, while you are awake, you need to be pedaling!

Now, the glory that we give to God the Father by our works, by our shining light, may not manifest itself right away. In fact, more often than not, there is a lag. There may be the initial thing where what we do pleases God. But, the effect of it may not occur for days, or weeks, or months, or years. It may not come into full effect until the resurrection when somebody remembers seeing your light shine on one particular day in an act of service that you may have done for them, or an example that you set because you were walking in the light.

We should not expect good things to happen immediately from our light shining. They will. God will certainly bless us, but as Peter said in I Peter 2, sometimes our shining light brings persecution and death!

Those certainly are not things that we would hope for in making our light shine. But, they are part of the deal. Remember what I said about walking in the light as He walked in the light. Remember what happened to Him?

But, even so, He death still shined. It will always shine as an act of walking in the light. No one has ever made his bulb burn so brightly as He did, and specifically in that particular act. For by one sacrifice, all sin can be forgiven.

Paul makes a big deal out of that in the latter part of the book of Hebrews, specifically chapter 9.

One act of righteousness, one sacrifice of Himself has for all time done the deed to give us justification.

Now, of course, we will not be able to make our light shine quite to that degree. But, that shows you the example that He set for us, and the high standard that we have to reach for in making our light shine just as His light shined.

The New King James titles this section in Philippians 2, "Light bearers." You will recognize this right away.

Philippians 2:12-16 Therefore, my beloved, as you 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; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Just one small thing about that last verse, to pick up where we left off in the last section: Paul said that he might not be able to see the results of this until the day of Christ, until the resurrection. Even so, he did not want to be disappointed that somebody let his light bulb go out.

What we have here in verses 12 through 16 is a statement that working out our salvation is the process of walking in the light.

Paul mentions a few specific matters here.

He first talks about obedience. Specifically to him, but also to God. Probably, he meant more toward God. He says "but now much more in my absence?" that they had actually shown that they could obey without him being there scolding them, or watching over them. That was good.

He also mentions not murmuring, not complaining, and not arguing.

Then, he gets down to holding fast to the truth.

He urges us to be blameless, and harmless, which would have been better as "innocent." Both blameless and innocent imply overcoming sin and living righteously.

We need to do all these things to make the proper witness before a world spiraling down into the abyss as he calls it there, "in the midst of a crooked, and perverse generation?"

Of course, we need to be doing this so that we will make it into God's Kingdom. That is what he gets to in verse 16.

It is interesting that he focuses on murmuring, and disputing. I cannot think of anything that dulls our witness more quickly. Obviously, killing somebody, or committing adultery would dull our witness badly. But, in the normal course of things we are not committing such blatant sins. If we have begun understanding this way of life, we are not doing those types of things. We may not be to the point, yet, where we have taken complaining and arguing out of the mix.

Now I know that there is a lot in this world to complain about. There seems to be a great deal in this world to argue about; picking little fights with one another over doctrine or whatever it might happen to be.

But, this runs counter to everything God is trying to work out in us!

What is the one thing that comes to your mind about the children of Israel in the wilderness? Murmur-murmur-murmur?!

They did it all the time and God was very quick to say that, "the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against God?" to bring it to our attention as an example of something that will keep us from getting to the Promised Land. Paul brings it up right here in Philipians.

What do we have to complain about?

God has taken care of everything. All we have to do is walk behind Him or with Him.

But, we find things to complain about all the time.

"God is not fair!" "I should have more money!" "I did not deserve that!" "I, I, I, I, I."

God says that is the wrong spirit. The light bulb is burning rather low.

We should be like Paul. Content with every state that we find ourselves in. If we believe that God is sovereign in our lives, if we believe that He takes care of us, that He is there in us, why should we fear or complain about where He has put us?

Obviously, He has found that this is where He wants us right now. And even if it is a bad thing He has allowed us to go there, to get into the mess, and we deserve it.

What good is complaining going to do?

All it does it call God into account that He has not done for us what we think He should have done for us. If we start complaining, if we have this sour look on our face, if we are always going around griping, it shows to those who are around us, whether they are in the church, or in the world. That spirit of murmuring is readily identifiable, and people are turned off by it.

Now you think about somebody who might be interested in the church of God and he comes into our assembly. And, there are people there bickering and complaining about "woe is me," and, "all these things that have happened," and, "it is just terrible," and, "I do not deserve it." Most people are going to turn around and walk back out. They do not want to be in the midst of that kind of spirit, and behavior.

We have just not given the correct witness.

I could go on like this about disputing as well. No one would want to come into the middle of a fight.

What is produced in war? No good thing, usually just death and destruction. And, that is all that disputing is! It is a minor form of warfare! Obviously James 3:17 says that the fruit of righteousness cannot be produced while in such a state.

So, if someone comes into our assembly and we are just bickering all the time, then for his own sake he should not come among us. He is not going to grow.

So, we have here something to think about in terms of our fellowship. Do we complain a lot? Are we arguing all the time? Both of which show that our lights are not shining. We are giving off the wrong impression. It is something that we should ask forgiveness for and put out of our lives.

Ephesians 5:8-14 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."

Now Paul picks up here again on the sharp divide that Jesus makes on this matter of light and darkness. We were once evil, we were once darkness, and now we are good, we are light. I hope we are good. I hope that we are becoming better. Make sure that we stay on the good side. That is what Paul is getting at.

He mentions the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit gives us benchmarks to gauge where we stand along the line of this light versus darkness spectrum.

We know that if we look at the fruit of our lives, the fruit of what the spirit is producing in us, whether something—an action, a behavior, a thought, or some sort of speech—is good, righteous, or true. We should be able to gauge that by the fruit of the spirit that is in us. It should fall somewhere within those three things. It should be good, or righteous, or true.

If the things we are producing are not good, righteous, and/or true, then we slipping toward the dark side.

And, in gauging these things going through our lives, seeing where we fall on this spectrum, we should then be in the midst of the process of proving what is acceptable in the Lord. We need to be evaluating ourselves to see how intense the light is that is shining from us.

As we go through our Christian life, we have to be constantly looking at what we are producing, seeing whether it fits with the good, the righteous, and the true. By this process, we prove to ourselves and to others who might be watching what is good and acceptable.

Of course, we are supposed to walking in the light all the time.

He says in verse 11, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness?"

If something that you have come across is not good and right, and true, get rid of it! Have nothing to do with it. It will not produce anything good.

This "have no fellowship with" can also be, "do not participate in or with," or it could be, "have nothing to do with."

Do not skirt the edge of the cliff!

If you evaluate something, and you get a funny feeling about it, and you wonder just how right it is, RUN! Just like Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife. Leave everything behind and get out! Have nothing to do with those unfruitful works of darkness, because they are just going to shut your light down. They will flip your switch off.

Now, it says that we should expose these things. In the case of Joseph, he exposed her adultery by running, and leaving his coat behind. She used it to put him into prison. But, the astute reader of the Bible sees that it was proof of her licentiousness—her lust for him.

Exposing darkness can be done passively or actively. It could be done directly or indirectly. It could be done silently or done in word. Paul is not specific about how we expose these works of darkness. But, there are many indications that all we have to do is shine and those things are exposed.

All we have to do is be what God has made us to be. And, the darkness, the evil, is shown for what it is.

So, we do not need, necessarily, to get on some crusade about things. Certainly, we need to get on a crusade with ourselves, and expose the things that are within us that should not be, and run as fast as we can from them. The other things will take care of themselves.

God, if He wants to, will give us opportunities to make a witness in a broader sense, but we first must be making a witness to ourselves, and supporting those things that are right, and getting rid of those things that are darkness.

Then, Paul tells us, if we would go on here (verse 15 and beyond) that when we come across these situations, work on them wisely, and circumspectly. We need to really think about these things.

Then Paul goes into marriage and our light shining there. He goes into our childrearing. He goes into our employment. And then he ends up with the whole armor of God. All of these things have an effect on the light that shines from us. He tells us to start within ourselves, and then within our marriages, and then with our children, and then in our jobs and employers, and the ring continues outward from there. But, it all starts with number one. That is where we begin to expose the works of darkness and to get rid of it.

I have pretty much reached the end, except for my stir to action section.

Today is the last Sabbath before the Feast of Tabernacles. Next week at this time, you will be hearing me again.

But, the Feast of Tabernacles gives us the opportunity to shine as lights in the world in a way that we do not have while we are at home. Many of us—housewives for example—do not get the opportunity to go into the world very often—and that is just fine. Many of the men have to go to work, and some of the women as well, and they have to interact with the world.

But, the Feast is eight days, plus travel time, in which we are constantly in the world.

When we get up, we are very soon interacting with a waitress or with a maid, or someone in the world who is going to see us, to speak with us, to get an impression from us. And what makes this different from a normal time is that the Feast in a large measure, the people that we come in contact with, and the public at large, know why we are there.

They do not know fully, but they know at least that we are with the church of God, and that we are supposed to be there for a religious convention of some sort. And so we are already marked for scrutiny.

So, what kind of impression are we going to make on these people who know that we are associated with church of God, and then therefore, supposedly, representing God Himself?

Will they remember our courtesy, our generosity, our good humor, and/or our smiles?

Or, will they think of us as rude, complaining, miserly, and/or grouchy?

Will they, therefore, think God is happy and pleasant? Or will they think that, by our behavior, God is a grump?

Will they notice our children as well-behaved, respectful, and controlled? Or will they see wild, loud, brash hooligans?

Will they think we are temperate in all things? Or will they consider us wine, beer, and liquor swilling luses?

Will they see mounds of beer bottles at our door because we had just drank a six-pack that night? Will they see us constantly at the bars?

I am not saying that we should not be drinking, because God allows it. He specifically says at the Feast that we are allowed wine and strong drink. But, there is also our witness that must be factored into that.

Just think about it.

Do we want people to think of God's church, and the people of God's church, and thus Jesus Christ Himself as someone who always has a beer in their hands? Or is that the right impression to be making.

I know for many years as far back as I can remember, there have always been problems with alcohol at the Feast. It is a liberty we have been given, but too many times it has been abused. Think of it in terms of one's witness. That is all that I am saying.

I know for sure that I will be having a few drinks at the Feast. But, I will probably have them with dinner and I will have one. I am not saying that I am the example here, but I have thought about this. I have got to remember who I am, and the example that I have to make—not just to my children, but to everyone.

There have been too many ministers who have abused this privilege and then made a bad example to the congregation. Things go downhill from there.

I am saying that you have to have a similar perspective. We need to be considerate of each other, and the other guests, and the hotel staff. We seem to get complaints every year about kids and adults staying up too late, talking loudly, shouting outside the rooms, running along the paths and balconies, up and down the elevators, and who knows what else.

We hear about loud parties in the rooms, with under-age teens drinking, and doing various amounts of carousing; coming in very late from whatever their activity.

These things should not be so.

We should let our light shine at the Feast of all times of the year, because everybody knows who we are.

So, let us decide to make this the Feast that none of these things happen—where we are self-controlled, temperate, and seriously think about honoring God and glorifying Him at all times.

These things might seem small to you, but they are a part of our witness. Whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not—I do not care if you like it or not—the way we speak, the way we look, dress, and act, all reflect on us personally, on the group at large, and ultimately upon God Himself. We should be remembering this every second of the day—not just at the Feast—our every action is being watched.

We might not think that it makes a difference, but it does.

Are we going to be honorable among the Gentiles (as it were)? Will they give glory to God because of our examples? It is up to you.

It is time that we buckled down and took control of ourselves, and our children, and make a fitting, glorifying witness for God.

The time is too short to put it off. It is one of our chief duties as His begotten children to let our light so shine before men so that they can see these good works and glorify God because of them.

We will finish in Isaiah 60. This is a prophecy that applies primarily to Jesus Christ, but it fits with us too. We do have an affinity with Christ.

Isaiah 60:1-3 Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, [Is it not getting darker out there by the day?] And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.

Let us arise! Right now! And shine!