

Clutching the Light

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Philippians 2:1-4 NKJ Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

2 Corinthians 4:6 ⁶ For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Because Christ is our light, therefore our text reminds us to always be mindful of this light. We need to keep our eyes on that light so that we do not stumble in the darkness.

Philippians 2:1 therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy

Stephen King's novel "the Body" tells the story of four twelve-year-old boys on an overnight hike to find a dead body. After hiking most of the first day they stop early. Not because they are tired but because they are afraid of being too close to the body at night.

Why are we afraid of the dark? Why do we see ghosts in the dark? In the light the truth is obvious, but the darkness hides.

Even Jesus disciples make the same mistake. Alone in the boat, in the night, in the wind, they see Jesus walking on the water. They assume he is a ghost. Even when Jesus calls out to them they are not fully convinced.

Peter says "if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Matthew 14:28

There is no mystery why this is so. The darkness hides the truth. In broad daylight it is obvious that there is no monster behind the tree. In the bright light of noon, it is clear that it is only a branch scraping the window.

The darkness hides the truth and gives room for our fears. The light reveals the truth.

Just as physical darkness can obscure the truth of physical things, so also spiritual darkness can and often does obscure the truth about spiritual things. Where truth is obscured, we often fear the worst.

In the darkness of anger, or resentment, or pride, or depression, or sadness, or any other negative or sinful emotion we can quickly forget the truth which is so obvious in the fullness of the light of Christ.

I recently witnessed firsthand a rather intense display of this truth. A certain person was so overcome with darkness that they heard evil in every word. No matter what was said all they could hear was hatred.

Many of us have many been either or both the receiver and the giver of this attitude. Where every kind word is repudiated as though it is the greatest evil, and every attempt at giving kindness is thrown in the face.

The darkness hides the truth.

Part of growing up is learning to remember even at night the truth which is so evident during the day. It is only a branch at the window. So also, part of growing up spiritually means learning to remember even in darkness the truth which is revealed by Christ.

Paul encourages us always to remember the truth revealed by Christ:

Philippians 2:1-2 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

The eighth commandment addresses this very mindset.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or say anything that might ruin his good name and reputation; but we should defend him, speak well of him, and explain all his words and actions in the best possible way.

The eighth commandment is not only talking about how we speak to others but like all sin it begins in the heart. How do we speak about others to ourselves?

God admonishes us not to jump to the worst conclusions about others even in our own mind.

Zechariah 8:17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the LORD."

Proverbs 6:16 16 These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

Proverbs 6:19 19 A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

God's law speaks against this attitude not only because of the harm we might do our neighbor, but because of the harm we do ourselves. When we see every branch as a skeleton or hear every word as antagonistic, in either case we live our life in fear.

The eighth commandment like all of God's laws is very good at making us feel bad but doesn't help us to change our life. Which is why we come back again to our text where Paul does not point us to the Law of Moses but the light of Christ.

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What is that we have received from Christ? Mercy, affection, fellowship, ***comfort***

Just like a parent who does not scold a child for being afraid in the darkness but comforts them with the reassurance that it is only a branch, so Christ has given us assurance and comfort to hold on to in the darkness.

Job did not give in to the fear that God was punishing him for his sins, but instead confessed "I know that my REDEEMER lives." Job confesses faith in his redeemer who forgives his sins.

He does not need to worry about God's punishment because his sins are forgiven in Christ.

Joseph had the promise of God given to him in a dream that one day it would work out for good. The promise that he would see his brothers and father again. In all the darkness he went through he maintained the faith in those promises of God.

Elisha saw Elijah go into heaven, and no matter what darkness he faced he knew what his end was.

What consolation, comfort, fellowship, or mercy has God given to you? Meditate on these things.

You might think you don't have a vision like Elijah or a promise like Joseph, but you do. You have the visions of John and of Easter morning. You have the promises of Christ. In all darkness we need to hold on through faith to these things.

Psalm 94:18-19 18 If I say, "My foot slips," Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up. 19 In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.

Rather than looking back on his own sin or the sins of others, the Psalmist looks instead to the Lord's mercy. Rather than fearing the path ahead, he is confident that the Lord will keep him from slipping. Rather than allowing the fears inside to float

around in his thoughts, he meditates on the comforts that God has given in his word.

These are the things we have received from Christ. We have received not darkness but light. Paul reminds us to share the light with one another.

Part of the evil of this world is that when people receive only darkness, they know how to give only darkness.

If we ourselves lack any good thing, we should not demand it of one another, but we should look to Christ and receiving it from him, we share with one another.

In the darkness remember Christ and don't give in to the fears of the darkness. Amen