

## TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM

Being blind is difficult. Having no light at all is downright dangerous. Insufficient light causes problems for physical health. Brian Handwerk, in an essay for *Smithsonian Magazine*, wrote:

For starters, UV rays in sunlight trigger a photosynthetic process in the skin that produces vitamin D. This vitamin's active form may help to regulate more than 1,000 genes, which in turn govern most of the body's tissues. Vitamin D is also crucial for bone health and for keeping the immune system going strong. (Brian Handwerk, "The Dangers of Winter Darkness: Weak Bones, Depression and Heart Trouble," *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 15, 2014)

Sunlight is also good for mental health, according to Handwerk:

Decreased sunlight can cause drops in your body's production of serotonin, a brain chemical that helps to determine mood. Lack of light can also alter the brain's balance of melatonin, a chemical produced during the hours of darkness that helps to govern sleep patterns and mood.

Lack of light affects the body, but it is also bad for the soul. The Greek philosopher Plato, in his book, *Republic*, wrote of the Ring of Gyges, a mythical ring that makes the wearer invisible to the human eye. Plato considered the question whether everyone who might wear the ring would do evil with it. Behavior scientist Francesca Gino reported on an experiment she and some other university professors conducted on the subject of honesty. In the experiment, the test subjects were divided between two different rooms, one well lit, and the other dimly lit, and they were asked to perform a task. Concerning the outcome, Dr. Gino wrote:

... in fact, on average, about half of them cheated across conditions. More interestingly, the level of darkness in the room dramatically influenced participants' likelihood to lie by overreporting their performance: almost 61 percent of the participants in the dim room cheated, while 'only' about 24 percent of participants in the well-lit room cheated. In other words, eight additional fluorescent lights reduced dishonesty by about 37 percent. (Francesca Gino, "What Darkness Does to the mind," *The Atlantic*, June 13, 2013)

Being in darkness is like wearing the Ring of Gyges, a mythical ring that makes the wearer invisible to the human eye. Plato, in his *Republic*, considered the question whether everyone who might wear the ring would do evil with it. Darkness can be harmful. Yet, darkness can be good. Some people need darkness to sleep. So, they use sleep masks and blackout curtains. Physically, some darkness is good. Spiritually, however, darkness is always bad, and never good. Men are born into spiritual darkness. God is light however, and the Son of God is the light of the world, and he calls men out of darkness, and into His light.

The Scriptures begin with these words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 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." (Genesis 1;1, 2) When God created the world, it was shrouded in darkness. There was no light on the earth, and this state of things was not good. Because there was no light, the earth could not sustain life. The Scriptures say:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” (Genesis 1:3–5)

God commanded that there should be light, and so there was light. When the light appeared, God considered it good. He then separated light from darkness, and, although there was as yet no sun for the earth, the rotation of the earth relative to the light resulted in the earth being, at any given time, partly in light, and partly in darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness Night. This movement from light to darkness, from night and day is an earth day, and the day on which God made the light reckoned as the first day of creation. Because God caused there to be light, there could be life. So God, after He created light, created all the living things.

God caused there to be light, but He Himself is light. When God first appeared to Moses, He appeared as a great light. The Scriptures say, “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.” (Exodus 3:2) The Lord appeared as a fire, but one that did not burn up the bush. When Israelites were at Mount Sinai, God appeared as a flame of fire. The Scriptures say, “And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.” (Exodus 24:17) The appearance of God was so bright that He seemed to be a fire that would consume anything it touched. When Moses asked God to reveal to him His glory, God agreed to do so. Yet, He said, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” (Exodus 33:30) The Lord would reveal to Moses His glory but He would not appear to Moses in all His glory, because His appearance was too much for any mortal. God said He would place Moses in a cleft of rock, and cover Moses with His hand as He passed by. In this would, He would reveal just enough of His glory that Moses would not be destroyed. Saint Paul characterized the Lord as “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see.” (1 Timothy 6:16) Saint John wrote of God, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:6) In the Scriptures, darkness is a metaphor for ignorance and depravity. So, that God is light means that He is knowledge and righteousness. God knows all things, and is perfectly righteous.

God is light, but men come into the world in darkness. They come into the world ignorant and depraved. God has through His creation revealed to all men the truth about Himself, but men, because they are sinners, suppress the truth. They are willfully blind to the truth about God. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” (Romans 1:21) Because men reject the truth about God, they believe lies and so are in spiritual darkness. They do not acknowledge God, and they do not obey God. Men subject God to their scorn, so God subjects men to His wrath.

Sinful men are in darkness. If any would be saved from the wrath of God then he must be enlightened. If a man would be saved from the wrath of God, then God must bring that man out of darkness and into light. God revealed Himself to Moses, and He called Moses to lead the Israelites into the truth. By Moses, God led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and into freedom to serve God. Moses parted the Red Sea so that the Israelites might escape the pursuing Egyptian army. At Mount Sinai, God revealed Himself to the Israelites. The Scriptures say, “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.” (Exodus 19:18) To the Israelites, the Lord revealed Himself as severe, and so caused the people to fear Him, so that they might obey Him. Through Moses God revealed His law, the Ten Commandments. God made a covenant with the Israelites in which God promised to be their God so long as they obeyed His commands. (Exodus 19:5) At Mount Sinai, Moses was with God for forty days, and forty nights, during which time he neither ate nor drank.

(Exodus 24:18; 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9) The people promised to obey God, but they soon broke their promise. They broke their promise not one time, but time and again. When the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He said:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:7, 7)

God revealed Himself to Moses as severe, but also as merciful. By Moses God brought the Israelites into the light, but they would not have it. The Scriptures say:

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10–12)

Moses was so great a prophet, so great a man, that, after he died, God Himself buried His body. (Deuteronomy 34:6) Moses was a great prophet, but he could not save God's people.

After the death of Moses, God's people regularly rebelled against God. So, God sent them prophets to call them to honor their covenant with God, to repent of their sins, and turn to God. One such prophet was Elijah. Elijah confronted Ahab, wicked king of Israel, concerning his sins. He clashed with the prophets of Baal, and on his command, the people killed them all. When Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, learned of it, she swore to kill Elijah. So Elijah, for fear of his life, fled into the desert, and after a day's journey he despaired of living. After eating, drinking, and resting, he traveled for forty days and forty nights, without food and water, until he reached Mount Sinai, also called Mount Horeb. The Scriptures say:

And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11–12)

As the Lord passed by Moses, so He passed by Elijah. The Lord caused a great wind to tear apart the mountain and break the rocks into pieces. Then the Lord caused the earth to quake. Then the Lord caused a fire. In none of these things did the Lord appear to Elijah, as He had before appeared to the Israelites, but the Lord rather spoke to Elijah, as He had before spoken to Moses. Later, Elijah prophesied that dogs would lick the blood of the dead King Ahab, and that dog would devour the corpse of the wicked Jezebel King Ahab died in battle against the king of Syria, propped up in his royal chariot after being struck with an arrow, and the dogs did lick his blood. (1 Kings 22:34–38) Jezebel died when she was thrown out of a window, and the dogs did devour her body. (2 Kings 9:30–37) So all happened just as Elijah prophesied.

When the time came for Elijah to die, he and Elisha his apprentice went to the River Jordan, the river that God commanded Israel to cross in order to enter into the promised land, the river that God forbade Moses cross. There Elijah removed his mantle, or cloak, rolled it up so that it resemble a staff, and with it struck the waters of the river, and the waters parted so that he and Elisha crossed over on dry ground, just as Israel crossed

over dry ground after Moses parted the Red Sea. Then there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated Elijah and Elisha, and conveyed the master prophet up to heaven in a whirlwind. So Elisha succeeded Elijah just as Joshua succeeded Moses. Elijah was, like Moses, a great prophet, but he could not save God's people.

After Saint Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus told His disciples that the ruler of Israel would kill Him, but that three days later He would rise from the dead. He would give His life for theirs, and He told them that they should be willing to give up their lives for Him. Then Jesus told them that some of them would live to see the kingdom of God established. Saint Mark recorded what followed:

And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. (Mark 9:2–9)

One week after Jesus told His disciples of His death and resurrection, and of the establishment of His kingdom, Jesus led Peter, James, and John, the inner circle of disciples, to a high mountain, just as Moses and Elijah had gone to Mount Sinai. There Jesus was transfigured before them. His clothing brightly shone, and was white as snow, whiter than any cleaner could make them. There appeared before them those two great prophets, Moses and Elijah, who talked with Jesus. The three disciples were afraid, and Saint Peter spoke, not knowing what to say. A cloud was above them, and a voice out of the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." When the disciples looked around, they saw that Moses and Elijah were gone, and only Jesus remained. As they descended the mountain, Jesus told them to say nothing of what they saw, until after He rose from the dead. As God at Mount Sinai appeared to Moses, and to Elijah, so on this mountain He appeared to Jesus's disciples. The disciples saw for themselves the brilliant glory of the Son of God, and they heard for themselves His Father identify Jesus as His Son, and command them to hear Him, and to obey Him. Moses and Elijah were great prophets, but they were not able save the people of God. Jesus is the Son of God, and God's greatest prophet, and He is able to save His people. Saint John wrote of Jesus, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:4, 5) Jesus Himself said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12) The glorious Son of God came into this dark world to shine into it His brilliant light. He has brought to the world both knowledge and righteousness.

Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom

the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3–6)

The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17) Before Christ, the law could only condemn, because men were too sinful to keep it. The Son of God gave the apostles a ministry of righteousness, because by His death men have forgiveness of sins. The Christian has renounced shameful things done in secret, and so does not live by craftiness, or adulterate the word of God. He rather openly proclaims God's truth, and so commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. If the gospel is hidden, it is only hidden from those that are perishing. The devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel. Saint Paul and the other apostles did not preach about themselves, but about the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostles considered themselves but servants of Christ's church. In the first creation, God made light shine out of darkness. In the new creation, He has caused the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, which is seen in the face of Jesus, to shine in the hearts of believers. So, those who believe in Jesus have both knowledge and righteousness. They have both the knowledge of God and His law, and they have the power to obey it, and the forgiveness of sins when they fail to obey. Saint Peter wrote of Christians, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (2 Peter 3:9)

Let us understand that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. Let us believe that Jesus is the true Light, which enlightens every man that cometh into the world. Let us believe the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, and proclaim it to others so that they, too, may be enlightened.

Now unto the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.