

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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Shining As Lights in the World
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Dear radio friends,

There is a verse in Philippians 2 that establishes an important reality about God's people. We read in verse 15 of that chapter: "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."

Not only does this passage speak of the reality that we are lights that shine, but it points out to us our calling as God's people too. This Word of God assumes something about God's people. It assumes that they are lights in this world. It is not a question whether they are lights or not. They are not even enjoined here to be lights. At the end of this verse we learn that those who are God's people *are* lights that shine in this world.

God's people must know this. *We* must know this. But before we can understand this reality, we must realize that this was not always the case. We were not always a light. At one time we walked in darkness. We were children of the

night, children of the darkness. And the darkness that once characterized us is the darkness of sin and unbelief. Sin and unbelief is rightly called darkness in the Scriptures because, in a spiritual sense, it really is true of us, because in it we cannot see God. We are unable to believe on God.

You know how it is in the middle of the night, when there are no lights on in the house. We get up and, so as not to disturb anyone else who is asleep, we leave the lights off. We grope around in front of us with our hands, unable to see anything. Maybe we stub a toe or stumble over something that is in the way. The point is that we are not able to see where we are going. And certainly, if we were in a large forest rather than the confines of our own homes, we would certainly go lost. We would lose our way.

Such is true of one who is in darkness spiritually. He cannot see spiritually. The way is not known to him. And when he attempts in his darkness to find the way, he always finds the wrong way. He

stumbles into sin whichever way he turns. He is blind. According to Romans 8:7 he cannot see the way of God's Word and commandments.

Well, at one time you and I who are God's people were in the darkness of that sin and unbelief, unable to see, stumbling about in our sin. We walked always and ever in the ways of sin, seeking one way and then another, but never finding the way that is the way of life, the true way.

Paul describes this for us well in Ephesians 2:2, 3. He write there, "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

But here is the blessed reality that is true of God's people. Now we are children of the light and of the day. We shine as lights in this world. Paul tells us in the word of God before us that we shine as lights. The darkness of sin and unbelief in us has been dispelled.

In considering this blessed reality we must not fail to understand just how it is that we who were in darkness at one time have now become light. Remember, it is God who works in us both that desire as well as the ability to do His good pleasure. It is a work of God in His grace that has made us lights in this world. The psalmist sings of this in Psalm 107:13, 14: "Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder." So it is that God, by an act of His sovereign grace, has taken us out of the darkness of our unbelief and given us light.

How did God do this? That is an all-important question. How did God give us this light? We have become lights in this world solely on the basis of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ came and gave light to us in order that our feet might no longer go astray, but that they might be guided into the way of peace. That light became ours when God, who is rich in mercy for His great love with which He loved us, quickened us together with Christ and made us alive with Christ. You see, at the cross Christ conquered the power and dominion of sin in our

lives. In His resurrection Christ also earned for us the spiritual life that is necessary to walk in the light. Then Christ sent out His Spirit into each one of us as His children, and at that moment of our regeneration the Spirit gave us spiritual life.

What is that light that God gives His children? Faith. It is the light of faith. It is a believing heart that sees and knows God. That light in us is the enlightenment or the knowledge by which we receive the things of the kingdom of heaven. We begin to see how great our sins and miseries are and our deliverance from sin only in the cross of Jesus Christ. The things of the kingdom once hidden from us by darkness now shine before us so that we are able to understand the things of the kingdom of heaven. When the light of God is shed abroad in us through that work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in His resurrection, then you and I become holy, as God is holy. Through the power of the cross and the resurrection we are

now consecrated and dedicated to God.

How grateful we are that God has given us both a desire and a spiritual ability now to serve Him and to do His will. We are lights.

*That light became ours
when God,
who is rich in mercy
for His great love
with which He loved us,
quicken'd us
together with Christ
and made us alive
with Christ.*

We are told by Paul, however, that we are such lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. We still live in a world

of sin. We still live in a world and a creation that is under the curse of sin. And though we have been given the light of God by means of our salvation, we still live among men who are of darkness. They have no light, none whatsoever. They are a darkness just as we were at one time. Listen to the description of this world that this passage of God's Word gives us: It is a crooked and perverse nation.

Now, let us not misunderstand. The word nation here in this verse does not refer to any one single nation. It speaks really of the generation of men who are born into the wicked world as a whole. The generations of wicked

men, born into this world, Paul tells us, are crooked and perverse. Certainly these words do not leave any room for a certain light of grace that shines in the men of this world. The men of this world in whom God has not chosen to shed the light of His saving grace are crooked. That is, they refuse, they do not even attempt, to walk in the straight paths of God and His Word. God is truth. His Word is truth. But the wicked of this world out of which we have been called still walk in the lie. And since the way of truth is straight and right, the lie is that crooked way of this world. In heart and mind there is darkness and, therefore, the desire to walk in ways that bend and turn away from God's way. In actions, too, they live in the lie. This is what characterizes this world of fallen man who is yet in darkness.

Wicked men are also perverse—that is to say, they are twisted and distorted. They take the truth, they distort it, and they make it seem to be the lie. And then the wicked of this world take the lie and they try to pass it off as truth. Or, as Isaiah says, the wicked of this world make evil good and good evil. And because of that they even frown upon God's people who attempt to walk according to His Word.

We live in a perverse world, a world that takes everything that is good and chaste and perverts it. Now, here is the reality. We are called by God to live in this crooked and perverse world as lights. What a contrast this is. Light and darkness are opposites of each other. They cannot mix. And yet here we are, smack dab in the middle of a world, a generation of men, that hates God and His Word. That world is blacker than night in its sin and unbelief. And right there in the midst of that world we have been made to glow. We shine brightly with the light of God in us. There is a day and night difference between us and the wicked world. There is really no common ground, from a spiritual point of view, between those who will to do God's good pleasure and those who trample under feet God's good commandments. No common ground at all. Except this: we all know what darkness is, do we not? Even we, as God's redeemed children, know what darkness is. Because we were there at one time. And such darkness still lurks in our sinful flesh. It still has a place in that old man of sin that dwells within us. But from the viewpoint of our salvation, there is no common ground between us and the wicked world, because they

do not share in the light together with us.

With this reality of being lights in a dark world comes a certain calling that belongs to us as God's children. Again, this verse does not say that this is our calling. It assumes that we know it *is* our calling. It does not tell us that we must make it our calling. It simply assumes that we will live in this way.

To be a light means we will also shine as a light. You see, a light shines naturally. A light bulb, for example, is a bearer of light. When that light is on, then it shines. Well, such also is our calling in the midst of this world of darkness. If we are lights, as we say that we are, then we must shine as those lights in this world.

Jesus speaks of that in His sermon on the mount, does He not, when He tells us that we may not hide our light under a bushel, but that we must put it on a candlestick so that it lights the whole house, and that we are lights upon a hill. Even our little children sing sometimes in a little child's song: "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." Well, that is true. We must let our lights shine in this world.

What this simply means is that you and I are called to

live as God's children in this world. Whereas the wicked of this world twist the good things of God and live in evil, we must walk, in all things, holy and good.

The wicked enjoy a frivolous and vain lifestyle. They live for the pleasures of this present life. And they look for their fun not in good, godly, sanctified living, but in sinful activities. Those who are of the light, on the other hand, seek their life out of God. They seek out places and opportunities to enjoy spiritual activities with God's people. That is what it means to shine as a light, to shine in this world as God's children.

Paul speaks of that in this Word of God that we have before us today. He speaks of us as the sons or the children of God. We are God's children. We are those who love our heavenly Father. We desire, therefore, to do the will of our Father. And we do that with fear and trembling. We let our lights so shine before men that they might behold our good works, and in that way we shine. We shine in the midst of the church as God's people together. And when God's people shine together in the church, that shining goes forth out of the church and out of their lives and into this world. The dark world in

which we live cannot help but see it. We shine so brightly in contrast to their darkness.

But do you realize that there is a way that we can hide that light in us? It is sad to say, but it is true. There is a way that we can significantly dim that light that shines in us. There is a way that can take that 150-watt bulb and dim it to a 20-watt bulb. What is that way? Sin. Ah, yes, as we said, there still is that darkness of our own sinful flesh in us. And sometimes that darkness in us can dim the light. And when you and I, as God's people, stumble into that way of sin and walk in the same ways as those who are still lost in darkness, our witness to them of what God has done for us no longer shines. Our bright lights then turn an ugly shade of yellow.

The reason for this is obvious. We claim to this world to be of the light. We say that, do we not? We say that we are Christians, that we are followers of Jesus Christ, that His mind is in us, that His desire is in us. We claim to be delivered from the sin and the darkness of this world. But when we walk in the same sins as this world, then what we say has no meaning. When we live no differently than the wicked world lives, then when we say that we are Christians,

there is nothing in the way that we live that distinguishes us as such.

We are called, then, to flee from sin. That is how we shine. We flee from sin, negatively. And positively, we walk in the ways of God's Word and in the ways of His commandments. We study God's Word. We delve into the truth of God's Word. We study His commandments and we begin to understand what they require of us in our lives. And then we go forth in this world and we walk positively in God's Word and commandments. When we do, then we will be blameless and harmless, the children of God, without rebuke.

That is what the Word of God here tells us. We will be blameless. That word "blameless" means "free from fault." No one is able to blame us for saying one thing and doing another.

We will be harmless. That means that you and I will be people without mixture of the evil together with the pure. It means that our light will be free of darkness. Our good will be free of evil. There cannot be this strange mixture of the two together in our lives.

So we will be blameless, and we will be harmless. Besides this, we will be without rebuke. There will be no rea-

son found in us on account of which we can be rebuked or admonished. There may be in us no sinful blemish by which we can rightfully be blamed by another.

Who is this other? The wicked world. Oh, yes, it is true that we must be holy and unblamable before God. And we all must realize that ultimately we will answer to Him in the day of days. But we have a wicked world watching us. And that wicked world, even though it does not like to say that it judges people, does judge us. It is watching the church of Jesus Christ with critical eyes. Never may we give the wicked world reason for just rebuke. We must be free from fault. We must be pure. We must be beyond rebuke by them.

There, then, is our calling in the midst of this world. If we are not children of the light who let our light so shine before men, then we will not be harmless and we will not be free of rebuke. We will not be blameless, and the world will be quick to call us hypocrites—people who say one thing but live another! If, on the other hand, we are as lights in the midst of a perverse nation, the wicked will not be able to accuse us of being just like them, really, even though we say that we are different from them.

They will see that we are different and they will see that we do fight the good fight of faith. For in this world we are lights that shine. Let them shine—bright as the sun, bright lights of holiness. When that happens, then the world will see our blameless witness and ultimately, in the day of days, that world itself will have to glorify God who is in heaven.

May we, in our walk of life as shining lights in this world, be careful to bring that glory to our God.

Let us pray.

Gracious Father, we are so thankful unto Thee that Thou hast worked in us by Thy grace and Spirit, taking us out of the darkness of this present world and shining in our hearts by Thy grace, spreading abroad within us the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now we pray that Thou wilt equip us as Thy children to go forth into this wicked and perverse generation of wicked men and so let our light shine that we might be witnesses to Thee of that grace that Thou hast worked in us. Continue to bless us and strengthen us. And where we have sinned we pray, forgive us. For Jesus' sake we ask this, Amen.