

4 Therefore, since we have this ministry as a result of the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged. 2 On the contrary, we have renounced shameful, underhanded methods. We do not operate in a deceitful way, and we do not distort the word of God. Instead, by proclaiming the truth clearly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled among those who are perishing. 4 In the case of those people, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is God's image.

5 Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

"Many Beliefs, Many Paths to Heaven!" That was the headline of a USA Today article a few years ago. It was reporting on a poll from the Pew Foundation suggesting that most Americans, including most Christians, would agree with that statement.

I remember back in the '70's when I first heard the saying that all religions really worship the same God just with different names and that people of all faiths can get to heaven if they are sincere in their faith. I thought that was the most ridiculous thing, but it made sense to me that non Christian religions would believe that. But today the majority of people who claim to be Christians have accepted that belief. Some even said that atheists or people with no religion at all could get to heaven, if they live according to their conscience.

Doesn't that suggest that most Christians are not really Christians at all? If they truly believe that, they are rejecting the very heart and core of Christianity. Jesus' clearly said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6 They are saying it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere in your faith. They are claiming that we are saved by how good we are, not by God's grace alone. That is not Christianity.

This trend also shows that people base their beliefs on their emotions and what feels right to them rather than on God's word. No one likes to think of anyone suffering forever in hell, especially not someone you know and love. It seems unthinkable that people in distant lands, who perhaps haven't even heard of Jesus, would be condemned. If people don't look to God's word for the truth, they will naturally choose to think that anyone can be saved if they are sincere and good people.

That is exactly where Satan wants people to be. As Paul says, "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled among those who are perishing. In the case of those people, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is God's image." Those who believe that all faiths can get to heaven usually think they are the enlightened ones and the loving ones, but God says they have been blinded by the god of this age, that is Satan. By turning them away from

God's word to rely on their own feelings, he is keeping them from clearly seeing the glory of Christ. So they claim to worship and serve Christ but they don't really see or understand the true glory of Christ.

Now look again at verse 6, "For the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ." That is the theme of this message:

God Makes His Light Shine to Reveal the Glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ!

Paul compares being enlightened to see the Glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ to God creating light in the beginning, to impress on us that bringing us to faith is a great miracle of His grace. Notice the way Paul describes how God created light in the beginning on the very first day of Creation. He said, "Light will shine OUT OF DARKNESS." That sounds absurd, doesn't it? Light can shine into darkness and dispel the darkness. We do that every time we go into a dark room and turn on the light. There is a light source that shines into the darkness and drives it away. But that's not what God did on day one of creation. Remember God didn't create the Sun, moon and stars until day four of creation. When God created light on the first day, there was no source of the light. God made light literally shine OUT OF Darkness!

Light is the most wonderful thing. It is absolutely essential for life. And God created it out of nothing so that it shined out of darkness. And He did it simply by speaking the words, "Let there be light." And there it was. What an incredible miracle.

Now note: This "is the SAME ONE who made light shine IN our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ." That is why we are believers in Christ. God has made His light shine in our hearts.

-I- Now Bask in the Light!

Notice, His light doesn't come OUT of our hearts, the way He created light to shine OUT of Darkness in the beginning. We will never see the light or find truth by looking in our hearts. Our best feelings of what is good and right will never lead us to the truth or to God. But God has made His light shine INTO our hearts so that we can see and know the true glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

We can see the glory of God's power in creating everything out of nothing simply with His word. We owe Him all praise and glory as our creator. But we see a far greater glory in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the glory of His love and mercy. Remember how Jesus prayed the night before He was crucified, He "lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You." Jesus and the Father were glorified by Jesus' willing suffering and death. It's the glory of God's love which was willing to make such great sacrifices to save us. The Father gave His only Son and Jesus gave Himself for us. He endured such great suffering and death for us, so that we could be saved from such torment and live with God forever. The glory of God's grace is clearly seen in Jesus Christ.

Thank God that He has enlightened our heart to see that glory. God has enabled you to see

what billions of people in the world cannot see. Rejoice in that light! Bask in the light of His glory every day. It's interesting that there are many health benefits to actually being outside in the sunlight. There are so many more benefits from basking in the light of God's grace, being exposed to God's light daily in His Word. Continue in His forgiving grace daily through repentance and give all praise to Him.

-II- Jesus now calls us to Spread the Light!

Do you ever wonder, what's the use? God just told us that the devil "has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is God's image." Our own experience has confirmed that people are content to continue in that blindness. They don't want to hear the gospel. They are opposed to the light of God's word. But remember, God's light is greater than the darkness. We too were blind when God made His light shine into our hearts. God can make His light shine in their hearts too.

Our Scripture reading from Isaiah 60 calls on us to "Arise and shine." Why? Because "The glory of the Lord is risen upon you." He goes on to explain, "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and deep darkness the people, but the LORD will arise over you and His glory shall be seen upon you." What a striking picture. The whole world is in darkness except you. The glory of God's grace is shining on you. Imagine if you were in total darkness. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. You are stumbling around and don't know where you are going. Then you saw someone that was shining brightly. They had light all around them and could see where they were going. Wouldn't you be drawn to them? Wouldn't you want to join them and walk in their light?

That is what God is describing in Isaiah 60. The whole world is in the darkness of unbelief because Satan has blinded them. But you have the light that can open their eyes. He wants you to let that light shine so that they may be drawn to the glory of God which they can see in you.

God has called each of us as individuals to "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matt. 5:16 But in our text He is also urging us as a congregation to let the light of God's grace shine brightly so that those still in darkness will be drawn to the light. Look again at the beginning of our text, "Therefore, since we have this ministry as a result of the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged." Remember Paul was an enemy of Christ. He was blinded by Satan and was persecuting Christ's Church. It was an act of God's great mercy that God literally shined His light upon Paul on the road to Damascus and enabled him to see the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Now he tirelessly proclaimed the message of Christ.

He says, "We have renounced shameful, underhanded methods. We do not operate in a deceitful way, and we do not distort the word of God. Instead, by proclaiming the truth clearly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Satan has many servants who operate in a deceitful way and distort the word of God. They weasel in the worldly ideas that glorify man rather than showing the glory of God's grace in Christ.

That is how he blinds people and keeps them from seeing the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. When we proclaim the truth clearly, as Paul says, “We commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.” The true word of God is still the power of God to salvation because it works on people’s conscience.

We thank God that we can say with Paul that “We do not operate in a deceitful way, and we do not distort the word of God.” We too are “proclaiming the truth clearly.” Thank God for that. But are we proclaiming it to the world who is still in the dark? We proclaim it among ourselves, which is important and necessary so that we continue in the faith and always keep the Glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ before our eyes and in our heart. But how are we as a congregation “commending ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God?” How are we letting God’s light shine in our community?

I just met a man this past week. After a brief conversation he asked what Church I was the pastor of. I said “St. Paul Lutheran Church.” He said “Hmm, I haven’t heard of that name in Vernon.” Sadly, I think that is probably the case with the majority of people in Vernon. They have never heard of us before and don’t know we exist. We have the truth that God uses to shine His light into people’s hearts to reveal the Glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the one truth that gives eternal Salvation. We can’t just keep that to ourselves. We need to be finding ways to let that light shine forth into our community that God may work through it to give salvation through His Son.

When you know the truth and understand the Light of God’s glory in the person of Jesus Christ, then it is obvious that Jesus is the only way to heaven and no one will get to heaven any other way. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” God was willing to make such a great sacrifice, giving His only begotten Son to save us, because He loved us so much and He knew that there was no other way we could be saved. He knew it was utterly impossible for us to be saved by our own goodness or sincerity because we are not good. So He lovingly gave His only begotten Son as the only way to escape from sin and from the punishment of sin. If people reject that one and only way that He lovingly provided and think they can be saved by some other way, by their own good works or by the sincerity of their belief in a false god, they are clearly still blinded.

God calls us to shine His Light so they can see. Many will still reject it in their blindness. As Paul said, they are the ones who are perishing. But don’t let that stop us from letting the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ shine brightly from our lives and our congregation.

Amen.