

In Your revelation of the Gospel, heavenly Father, You have shown us with utmost clarity that all reliance on our own efforts to gain righteousness in Your sight are vain and hopeless. Strengthen our faith in Your Son, our Savior, through whom You have provided complete salvation in His perfect fulfillment of Your Holy Law for us, so that credited with His righteousness our renewed hearts may lead us to run the way of Your holy commands in service to You and to our neighbor. Amen.

[Jesus said:] For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

In Christ Jesus, the Light that has come into our dark world, dear fellow redeemed:

When I was 19 years old I spent a summer painting houses, with Lisa and my college buddy, Ron. Ron and I would trade off doing the dangerous jobs. One time we had to deal with a hornet's nest at the peak of a three-story house. So what do college students do back in 1970s? We went to the library and read how to deal with such a menace: wear heavy clothing, cover your head with netting, wear gloves, boots, go at night, knock the nest into a bag and burn it.

So this is what we did. It was Ron's turn for the dangerous job, I was there steadying the big wooden ladder stretched out to its max. Lisa and Ron's girlfriend were in the car in the alley watching. But they were not the only ones watching. A neighbor saw these two men dressed with big heavy coats with faces covered, flashlights in hand, a bag and a stick. Evidently a call was placed to the police. So at the worst time, while Ron was batting at the nest, a patrol car arrived and turned his spotlight on the peak of the house! Fortunately there was another neighbor watching over the fence, who shouted at the police officer: "*Kill the light, do you want those boys to be killed!!*"

The light was to expose some criminal behavior, but quickly the declaration that it was a righteous activity was believed. Jesus came into our corrupted world to expose sin, but also through His work to

declare all sinners righteous. This is the lesson of our text, so - **Let God's Light Expose Sin and Bestow His Righteousness.**

I

Our Gospel lesson for today comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In it Jesus highlighted that the righteousness that is demanded in the Law of God is not simply an adequate amount of righteousness, as the religious leaders of His day thought. The scribes and Pharisees and most of the people who observed them, thought that their level of righteousness was more than adequate to please God and eventually allow them to enter heaven. But as Jesus finishes this section of His sermon, He clearly states that the only level of righteous living that God finds acceptable is absolute perfection.

Jesus, the perfect Son of God and Son of Man, lived in the light of perfect righteousness. By His very being and living, sin was exposed all around Him. Christians will often be puzzled over anyone being offended by Jesus. But you see His very name as Savior exposes sin. To need a Savior, one must be inadequate to save him or herself. As Christians we rejoice in that blessed name for Jesus, but for the sinner who is lost in impenitence, it is a name that condemns.

As Jesus tells us: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." However, even though that is not the purpose of our Lord coming to us, as the divine Light that has come into the world our sin is exposed. As Jesus pointed out "people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."

We heard in our Gospel lesson how deep the Law penetrates our darkened hearts. Our evil inner motives are even exposed, so that in the Fifth Commandment regarding murder, unjustified anger is condemned and even calling someone a "fool" deserves eternal punishment!

This is similar to those who avoid going to a medical doctor when symptoms of an illness manifest themselves. The ill person avoids going under the scrutiny of a doctor in the hopes that if the illness is not exposed it will not lead to a dreaded diagnosis. This can be deadly. Does this describe you? Not the avoidance of a doctor's diagnosis, but the avoidance of God's righteous light which exposes sin? If so, then you are not only facing physical death, but eternal death, which cannot even be compared to temporal death.

II

But the person who comes into the Light of the Son of God sent down from heaven to save all sinners and believes in Him is not condemned. Yes sin is still exposed for us as believers, but something else far greater than our sin is revealed. The righteousness of the Son of God has been produced under the Law of God for us sinners. The perfect righteousness, which even the scribes and Pharisees could not produce, was achieved by the Christ of God for everyone of us.

Again in Jesus' sermon on the Mount, our Lord anticipated the objection of the scribes and Pharisees accusing Him of abolishing the Law, He said: "I did not come to abolish ... but to fulfill." In perfect righteousness Jesus fulfilled all that God's Word requires of the human race. The Light of our Savior is not intended to condemn, but to reveal to the sinner that He is our righteousness. The Father now smiles upon the sinner in Christ. So "whoever does what is true, i.e., believes in the name of the only Son of God comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God (or stated even more clearly – 'carried out by God')."

Through faith in Christ the righteousness of God as produced by His Son is credited to sinners, so that the Light of the Son of God might shine before others. With the result that they might see their good works and give glory, not to the believer, but to their Father who is in heaven, who has dressed them in the righteousness of His Son. Do you understand how this works? If we like the scribes and Pharisees produced good works to be seen by our fellowmen, then we like them would receive the glory. But instead, since God has provided us the righteousness of His Son, He receives all the glory.

This is truly a wonderful Light to live under. The Light of our Lord casts out fear by showing us the great love of God. Our sins are exposed but our Lord shows us what He has done to overcome our sin. He suffered and died in our place. He also lived in our place. We lack nothing. In Christ we are without sin and we are perfect just as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Satan still tempts you to hide and seek the cover of the darkness of sin and death, because it is still uncomfortable to confront the truth of your sin being exposed. He tricks Christians to forsake the preaching of the Law of God and find preachers who satisfy their itching ears with "positive" messages, which falsely portray God as the great papa in the sky who overlooks sin and accepts our level of unrighteousness.

The Apostle John in his first letter warns us about this when he writes: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do

not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

But I know you are walking in the Light, my fellow believers in Christ. There is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. Let the Light of God's Word shine upon you with all of its blessings exposing your sin and bestowing upon you His eternal righteousness. Just as the bright light of the police officer exposed our apparent criminality, and also revealed our righteousness, the hornets fell into the flames of the darkness of condemnation; so your sins died in the darkness of condemnation with Jesus on the cross no longer able to sting you, you are dressed in His everlasting righteousness. Yes, you have wicked deeds of which you are ashamed, but standing in the Light Incarnate, you shine in His everlasting splendor. Amen.