

Interfaith Dialog on Light

Everyone likes light. As Solomon observed, *“Light is sweet; how pleasant to see a new day dawning.”* (Eccl. 11:7) It is no secret that sunlight helps us physically by producing vitamin D. Also it helps depressed people to feel better. Jayaram V comments on another dimension of light which is more relevant to our discussion; “Historically light has been universally associated with divinity or godliness in almost every culture and civilization.” He also says, “In Hinduism light symbolizes Brahman ... Divinity” (Symbolism of Light in Hinduism)

This connection between God and light also applies to the well known monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Let me illustrate by quoting from the Qur'an and the Bible, *“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.”* (Surah 24:35) In fact, this is “one of the most famous and often recited verses of the Qur'an,” according to *The Study Qur'an*, a compilation by five esteemed scholars. This idea is not unlike what Jesus said in 1 John 1:5, *“God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.”* (1 John 1:5) This in turn, confirms the teaching of earlier prophets, *“No longer will you need the sun to shine by day, nor the moon to give its light by night, for the LORD your God will be your everlasting light.”* (Isaiah 60:19) Centuries later the apostle John spoke of the restoration of all things, envisioning *“a new heaven and a new earth ... God's home is now among his people! ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever. ... his servants will worship him. And they will see his face ... And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.”* (Revelation 21:1-4; 22:5)

Jesus brings light

The Bible affirms that Jesus *“was the light of men.”* In a similar way the Qur'an says Isa (Jesus) received *“the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law.”* (John 1:4; Surah 5:46) Not only so, the quality of light that came through Jesus was not dimmed by any imperfections. He never committed even one sin. (John 8:46; 1 Peter 2:22; Surah 19:19)

For followers of Jesus who are committed to being his witnesses, it is important to understand that when our unbelieving friends have beliefs similar to ours, such as light, this can help us engage them in spiritual conversation in a gracious and seasoned-with-salt manner. (Col. 4:2-6) You may recall an earlier article, *Following the star*, where I described an example of how to do this.

In this article we continue to explore the theme of light by unfolding a series of simple steps that culminate in Jesus bringing *“life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”* (2 Tim. 2:10) Let me explain.

First, we will take a closer look at Proverbs 4:18, quoted earlier; *“the path of the righteous is like the bright morning light, growing brighter and brighter until full day.”* (Proverbs 4:18, NLT) Next we compare it with another similar Proverb in chapter 12 verse 28 which reads, *“In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.”* (NIV) Do you see how this implies a close connection between light and immortality, that is, eternal life?

One doesn't need a degree in theology to see how this pair of Proverbs point to Jesus. If we look at John 8:12 and 17:3 – two well know teachings of Christ – we see they harmonize beautifully with the above Proverbs. *Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't*

have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.” “And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.” (John 17:3)

Conclusion

We observed earlier that “light is sweet”. Although people like the light there are times when they hate it. Jesus said, *“people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.”* (John 3:19-20)

Point to ponder

Most people assume that because various religions have similar beliefs this means there can be many different ways to attain eternal life, i.e. reach God. However, we need to bear in mind: not all light is **true**. The apostle John pointed people to Jesus saying, *“The one who is the **true** light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”* (John 1:9) The expression “**true** light” implies there is such a thing as “false light.” This is evident in Luke 11:35 where Jesus said, *“Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness.”* (Luke 11:35; cf. Isaiah 5:20; 50:10-11) This motivates us who know the **truth** to help others find the **true** light in Jesus Christ.

Not only can we deceive ourselves, the Scripture says that, “Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) Interestingly, both the Bible and the Qur'an warn people not to be deceived by Satan.

If you want to read a more detailed discussion explaining how Jesus is the true light you may read, “The path of righteousness” by Roland Clarke which is available online at <https://tinyurl.com/y98mlsfw>