

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Man: Darkness?

"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)

John's opening verses focus on God's eternity, including the Word and the Word's full equality with God. Based on John's depiction of God and the Word—in John's writings a word that refers to the second Person in the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ—John walks us through the creation of the material universe. In Verse Five, the second sentence quoted above, John introduces us to something of a surprise. A moral and/or spiritual darkness appears that prevented comprehension of the moral and spiritual light that John has attributed to God in this context. What happened? What is this "darkness" of which John writes? What are its implications? How "dark" is it?

By his use of "shineth" in the present tense and his introduction of John the baptizer, the Lord's forerunner, John likely refers to the Incarnation in this verse, Jesus coming into human flesh as God Incarnate, and His rejection by the majority of people in Judaism at the time. However, this fact—as much as any fact in human history—affirms the utter fallenness of humanity that originated in Genesis 3. Before we can reach accurate conclusions as to Judaism's rejection of Jesus as God Incarnate, we must understand the present state of man and its impact on man's relationship with God.

A thinking reader could hardly conclude that John's reference to darkness refers to mere physical darkness. Material light and darkness were created by God the Word as part of the material universe. Material darkness has no intellect with which to "comprehend" the Word.

So what is this darkness that John uses to explain why the first century nation of Judah rejected Jesus as the Messiah and as God Incarnate? Where did it originate? What impact did it make on mankind and on the material universe? We shall linger with this question that John introduces here for some time. It is a profound question that will impose its weight on much—almost all—of our future exploration of Scripture's teachings regarding man, God, and man's future, his ultimate future. John does not

so much as imply that God created this particular darkness. Advocates of fatalistic determinism, the idea that God caused/causes everything, including sin, appeal to the earlier statement by John "...without him was not anything made that was made" as proof that God causes all events and actions, even sin. In that context John is clearly referring to the material creation of the universe, not to moral actions that occurred after the creation. As we trace Scripture's account of man's sin and its implications on all of mankind, man—specifically, Adam—not God is blamed for the event and is held accountable in Scripture for the state of man in sin. Multiple passages from both testaments could be offered to demonstrate that God does not cause sinful actions (Jeremiah 7:9-10; 7:31; 19:5; 32:35; 1 Corinthians 14:33; I John 2:16-17 to name only a few concise examples). James 1:12-15 asserts that God's wholly (and holy) moral character prevents Him from enticing—or even more clearly, causing—man to sin.

Consistently Scripture attributes the cause of sin to Adam, not to God.

Another objection that occasionally appears regarding God's judgment against man for sin questions the severity of the punishment imposed. This line of reasoning basically objects to the severity of God's sentence on the basis that a violation in time should extract a punishment in time, not eternal consequences.

Why did God judge man's sin so severely? If we follow the teaching of Scripture alone, we cannot avoid the clear teaching that God did impose eternal consequences onto man for sin. Why such a severe penalty? I offer that the Genesis account of creation reveals the reason for God's penalty against sin. Seven times in the first chapter of Genesis the inspired record of Scripture affirms that God's creation was

“good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Notice the following definition of the Hebrew word translated “good” in these passages.

“This root refers to “good” or “goodness” in its broadest senses. Five general areas of meaning can be noted: 1) practical, economic, or material good, 2) abstract goodness such as desirability, pleasantness, and beauty, 3) quality or expense, 4) moral goodness, and 5) technical philosophical good.”¹

Notice all five of the “senses” inherent in this word. If we apply the comprehensive word to the material creation of Genesis One, we reach a delightful—and I believe correct—conclusion.

1. Everything that God created had a practical value to it.
2. Everything that God created had an inherent beauty to it, not only in terms of visual appeal or beauty, but also “abstract goodness.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 specifically affirms this point.
3. Everything that God made was of impeccable quality. Nothing that He made was inferior!
4. Everything that God made, specifically in Genesis One a reference to the material creation, contained the quality of “moral goodness.”
5. Everything that God made affirmed the essential moral character of God in terms of “technical philosophical good.”

Once we leave the realm of what God created and move into what man did and the consequences of man’s sin we encounter a glaring contradiction to the above definition of goodness that Moses affirms in Genesis. More to the point of the objection that God’s punishment was excessively severe, Moses’ obvious emphasis by seven uses of the word in the first chapter of Genesis affirms the glaring and blatant violation that man’s sin imposed against God’s moral law and His affinity for both physical and moral beauty that He invested in every aspect of the material creation.

While we occasionally—and I believe inaccurately—restrict man’s sin to a simple rejection of and disobedience of one basic law

¹R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), 345.

regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the foundational premise that God’s whole creation was physically, practically, and morally “good” sets the stage and provides rational justification for the severity of the divine judgment against man’s sin.

The appearance of a distinct alteration in the nature of the material universe contained in God’s sentence against man in Genesis 3:17-19 affirms that man’s sin had a direct impact on the state of the material universe. What God created was “good,” but man’s sin corrupted that pristine goodness and brought a curse, not only upon man but also upon the material universe in which man was created.

The deterministic (or fatalistic) view that God ordered the events that culminated in the fall of man represents a glaring contradiction of the Biblical account of the creation and man’s sin. It smacks more of eastern religion and the yin-yang concept of opposing and presumably near-equal forces of good and evil than it represents a Biblical worldview.

God imposed a clearly moral responsibility upon man, the only being that He created in material form that affirms a distinctly different relationship between God and man from any other material thing that God created. Since angels were not created in material form, I do not include them in this assessment. Man is the only being in God’s *material creation* who possesses a rational and moral relationship with God, his Creator.

What Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden represented far more than an isolated encroachment against one simple divine prohibition. At its heart, that first act of sin challenged every aspect of God as Creator and Governor of the material universe that He created. It introduced moral “darkness” into God’s “bright” and glorious creation, a darkness that was—and is—all pervasive upon fallen man. In the next section we will examine the specific extent of the fall upon man.

In the most appropriate sense of the word man’s sin represented a black affront to the all-encompassing physical, economic or practical, and moral beauty of God’s whole material creation. This ultimate act of rebellion could not—and did not—go unnoticed or unpunished by God. The comprehensive scope of man’s first sinful act more than justifies and explains the severity of God’s sentence against man. This first act of sin was no minor encroachment. It represented a defiant “shake your fist in the face of God” act of anarchy and rebellion. The holy God who created the material universe was wholly justified in the sentence imposed.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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