

September 18 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows - Preface

Stained-glass windows were historically used in churches to inform the viewer via symbolism and narrative and were often referred to as the 'poor man's bible'. Stained-glass windows were a visible representation of the Bible's teachings such that even illiterate people could understand. Stained-glass windows have been crucial in spreading the Christian faith message to the masses.

'Glazed' glass windows that date back as early as the 7th century have been found. Churches started using stained glass windows extensively from the 12th century to the 17th century. During this time, most people could not read and relied on the priests to tell them the stories of the Bible. In time, as Christianity spread, the local language was not used since Latin was the formal language of the church service. The initial liturgical language used was Greek before approximately the year 190, when the Church in Rome changed from Greek to Latin. Since 1570, the Tridentine Latin Mass (Council of Trent) was the norm until the Second Vatican Council in 1962 with Pope John XXIII. The Latin Vulgate translation was also the predominant Bible of the medieval era. Vernacular translations did not come about until the 1500s, and typically, translations were required to have Catholic Church oversight and approval and came with great personal risks to those without such approval.

Today, stained-glass windows are seen in modern churches, primarily to honor and preserve their religious history, while providing for depiction of Bible stories artistically and creating a beautiful and devotion-inspiring ambience inside the church.

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. Of course, we cannot take in the full effect, beauty, and colors of the stained glass without the light that God provides. However, the significance of light in relation to God Himself is even greater than the light that provides for the beautiful and welcoming character of the stained glass windows that we enjoy in our worship and gathering.

2 Corinthians 4:6 - *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

Here the Apostle Paul has emphasized his sole mission to deliver the true gospel of Jesus and to proclaim that Christ is Lord. Phrasing the Gospel in universal terms, God is quoted: "Let light shine out of darkness." Only the light of the Gospel can penetrate the darkness of unbelief in Jesus. That was Paul's experience on the road to Damascus when a literal "light from Heaven" shone around him and the voice of the Lord spoke to him. God shone the light into Paul's heart, and it was the light Paul showed to all who would listen to the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus.

Paul describes the Gospel as the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Every culture has a "theme" such as this, an idea summarizing what the culture truly values. The United States, for example, tends to use "freedom" this way. In Paul's time, the Hebrews valued "light". Greeks valued "knowledge" as the culture of philosophy. Roman culture prized "glory", being the empire that conquered the known world. Paul's statement here incorporates all of these: light, knowledge, and glory, implying that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of anything and everything we could ever want. He is "the" Truth we all seek, even when we are blinded to our need by sin.

In the previous chapter of 2nd Corinthians, Paul discussed God's glory reflected in the face of Moses. As a reflection, the glory began to fade as soon as Moses left the presence of the Lord. The glory shining from the face of Christ, though, never fades. He is the source of the light. To see and know His glory is to share in God's glory for eternity. Paul adds a detail which is crucial to the Gospel: the idea of God giving mankind a person, rather than an idea, as our salvation. The light, knowledge and glory are reflected "in the face" of Christ. Rather than man being assigned virtues, or work, God intended us to seek a relationship with His Son.

1 John 1:5 - *God is light; in Him there is no darkness.*

The Apostle John provides one simple declaration of truth - **God is light**. Light was God's garment in Psalm 104:2 - *The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent. To Ezekiel, the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord was brightness: All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the LORD looked like to me (Ezekiel 1:28).* In Hebrews 1:3, Christ was the refracted ray of the Father's glory, "the express image of His person;" to James, the Almighty was the Father of all lights (James 1:17). Elliott's commentary shares the fullness of the Apostle John's God is Light truth - Light Physical, because it was He who called everything first out of darkness, and from whom proceeds all health and perfection; Light Intellectual, because He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, and in His mind exist the ideals after which all things strive; Light Moral, because His perfection shows that the difference between good and evil is not merely a question of degree, but fundamental and final, and the life of Christ had exhibited that contrast sharply once for all. Thus, on this declaration depends the whole doctrine of sin: sin is not merely imperfection; it is enmity to God. There can be no shades of progression, uniting good and evil: in Him is no darkness at all. Good and evil may be mixed in an individual: in themselves they are contrary.

John 12:46 - *I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness.*

Jesus publicly proclaimed that everyone who believed in Him, as His true disciple, did not believe in Him only, but on the Father who sent Him. By daily looking to Him, who came as Light into the world, we learn to obey, love and trust in Him. We are made free from the darkness of sin and all that would separate us from Him; we learn that the command of God our Savior is everlasting life. Christ called the sons of God children of the light {John 12:36}: *"Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."*

Matthew 5:16 - *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

So, what are we to do? Do as Jesus has commanded: As children of light, we are to let our light shine ... everywhere seen and known. But not for ourselves, but that our heavenly Father may be glorified.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(896\) Whenever God Shines His Light - Van Morrison - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday September 25

First Window on Left Facing Chancel (Upper Medallion) – The Adoration of the Shepherds.