

## Prayers

### To God

*Praise God for your day, especially those things within it that you do not like or things that you fear. Overcome the enemy by being an 'overcomer' in the name of Christ, and not one whose faith remains small and who holds back through fear.*

### For myself

*What small vices or sins plague your days? Are you embarrassed by them even though others do not know about them? Such things need to be brought to the Lord in prayer, perhaps daily, so that they do not make a spiritual barrier between You and Your Lord.*

### For others

Weekly theme: those at sea

Almighty Lord and God, protect those who live at sea, and who call on Your name; those who work for the fishing industry, the military, commercial shipping or the tourist industry, and others who use the seas for leisure. When facing the particular dangers of the sea, many will cry out to You even though they do not honour You as Lord and Saviour. Respond to these cries for help, Lord God, with saving deeds of power and might, so that people will come to know Your power and authority over the seas and ultimately over all things. Demonstrate Your Holy Name on earth, we pray: **AMEN**

---

## Meditation

When everything happens around me all too fast,  
Lord Jesus, slow me down.

When everything I see appears in chaos and disorder,  
Lord Jesus, bring me peace.

When everything challenges what I think to the core,  
Lord Jesus, grant me perspective.

When everything I come across is incomprehensible,  
Lord Jesus, give me understanding.

When everything around me appears to be out of control,  
Lord Jesus, keep my faith secure.

When everything I do meets opposition from others,  
Lord Jesus, give me courage.

When everything that I hear seems to deny what I believe,  
Lord Jesus, lift my spirit.

For You are the Master of all things, the great encourager,  
Lord Jesus, and I place my hope in You.

---

## Bible Passage

### **Luke 11:33-36**

**<sup>33</sup> “No-one lights a lamp and then places it somewhere hidden, perhaps under a bowl. Instead, it is put on a stand, so that those who come into a dwelling may see the light.**

**<sup>34</sup> “The lamp of your body is your eye. When your eyes are good and honest, the whole of your body is filled with light; but when they are evil, your body is full of darkness.**

**<sup>35</sup> Look carefully, then, at whether the light in you is not darkness; <sup>36</sup> for if your whole body is enlightened, and no part of it is in darkness, it will be completely full of light, just as when the bright rays of the lamp lighten you up!”**

---

## Review

This famous reading is something of an enigma. Most of us believe we understand what Jesus was saying when He gave His example of a light being placed on a lamp stand, which gives light to a whole room. But even before we move on to see what Jesus said about this illustration, we need to be careful. It is popular to think of this as Jesus' encouragement to us to let our faith and our gifts be seen by others in the world. This of course is a fair thought, for Jesus asked His disciples to 'go into all the world' to preach the Gospel and do the things He did (Matthew 24:19, John 14:12 etc.). But is this what Jesus is talking about here? As we read on into this famous saying, we need to be a little more careful about our presumptions.

To begin with, Jesus speaks about the lighting of a lamp (11:33). But He goes on to say more, and describes the eye as the '*lamp of the body*' (11:34). This is rather mysterious to us, because we would not quickly spot the similarities between the two. For us, a lamp works quite differently to an eye; even if they are connected by the concept of light, one is a natural feature of life, and the other is an organ of the body! Nevertheless, the rest of our passage is a saying of Jesus, connecting the two together. Fortunately, even if we do not quite understand why Jesus said '*the eye is the lamp of the body*', His message is not too difficult to grasp, at least on the surface. It is about the '*whole body*' being '*filled with light*' (11:35,36); and to this is added a strong moral message, in which Jesus speaks about the '*eye*' being '*good and honest*', and not '*evil*' (11:34).

What does all this mean? Certainly, although Jesus began with the famous saying about not '*hiding your light ... under a bowl*', what He said after it does not fit with the popular message about the availability of peoples' faith, gifts and talents in the world. The next few verses are all about the personal inner light, not about shining one's light outwardly. It seems that Jesus wanted to drive home a moral message about being honest and sincere and not letting evil have a hold within the personal spiritual life. His desire was to see people completely 'lit up' with the light (11:36), and it is impossible for us to conclude that the light can be anything

other than the light of God in Christ Jesus! He is the light that must be placed on the lamp stand of our lives, and not hidden away. We do not lighten up our own bodies, and we certainly do not do this through our own eyes!

While this is close to the heart of what Jesus was saying here, we are still faced with something of a mystery about why Jesus spoke about the eye as being '*the lamp of the body*'. If we are truly concerned to understand Scripture, then we should be ready to ask ourselves whether there is some aspect of this we have not yet fully understood. For indeed, there is, and it is all to do with how we think an eye works. In the first century AD, Jesus' understanding of the eye was quite different to ours today.

Nowadays, we regard the eye as a physical organ that lets light in, so that our brains collect the information this provides and deduce what we see. It is quite difficult to imagine otherwise! In a non-scientific world, however, people had a number of different 'views' as to the workings of the eye, and we know this from a variety of ancient writings, not least from passages from the Bible that refer to the eye in a variety of colourful ways (see 'Going Deeper'). But one thing is clear, and this is that ancient people had no concept of light being gathered inside the eye to make sense of the world, as we do. For them, the eye was rather like a window on the soul joining the individual with the outside world.

Moreover, ancient people believed that just as the eye enabled the individual to perceive some part of the world around (similar to our idea of letting light in), it also revealed some part of the inner personality to the outside world. Even to this day, we speak of seeing in someone's eyes something of their moods; for example, of seeing the brightness of life in a person's eye, and at the other end of the spectrum, seeing in their eyes the stress of illness or suffering. There may be more to this, but it is the best place to start if we want to try and understand Jesus when He says '*the eye is the lamp of the body*' (11:34)

So with all this in mind, it is possible to put together everything Jesus says here. The lamp placed on a lamp stand to give light to the whole body (11:33) is Jesus' illustration of an important truth. He wants people to take into themselves the truth of His light (11:35f.). In this way, the eye and the lamp have the same function, to allow light to be spread throughout a person's 'body'. We must spot here that Jesus does not use the word '*body*' in a negative sense, as Paul does when he writes about the 'spirit' and the body', decades later (Romans 6:6f.). He uses it here to refer to the whole of the person.

Jesus adds one interesting thing to this picture, and it is found in verse 34. Here, He says that when human eyes are 'good and honest', they allow the '*light*' of Jesus to fill the entire '*body*', but when the eye is evil, '*the body is full of darkness*' (11:34). So although the light is pure, it is filtered by our eyes, which have the power to 'perceive' things in different ways. He longs for human hearts to be open to the simple and child-like honesty that accepts God's Word and the evidence of Christ's work on earth at face value. This is the best way for people to be flooded with the light of God!

You may feel we have travelled around a large circle to reach these conclusions, and perhaps we have. However, by doing so I trust we have a much better understanding of this text, and have avoided some potentially wrong assumptions about a passage that is very important.

---

## Going Deeper

### ***Notes on the text and translation***

**V33**    '*No-one lights a lamp and then hides it away, or under a bowl*'

Other translations:

*'No-one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl'* (NIV)

*'No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar ...'* (NRSV)

This sentence is notoriously difficult to translate. The Greek reads more literally like this; *'No-one lights a lamp and places it in dark places, neither under a measure.'* The trouble with this in modern English is firstly that we light lamps precisely to put them *'in dark places'*, with the intention of using their light! So each translator attempts to convey the idea of some dark place that it is useless to light. The NIV helpfully talks about *'a place where it will be hidden'*, but I have shortened this to the more unspecific phrase, *'hide it away'*, which seems to me to make good sense.

The second issue is to do with the last phrase, which speaks of hiding a light under a *'measure'*, and hence in the Authorised Version, hiding it under a *'bushell'*, which was an ancient measure of grain. By far the best word to use here is *'bowl'*, because it conveys the idea of a measure used in cooking that can also cover something up. But it needs to be a bowl that is not transparent, and must have holes in it otherwise it will not do what the illustration requires! Lack of oxygen will kill a flame! However, we can work our way around such minor points to get to the heart of Jesus' point here without further difficulty.

**V34 'when your eyes are good and honest'**

Other translations:

*'when your eyes are good'* (NIV)

*'if your eye is healthy'* (NRSV)

The word translated 'good', or 'healthy' in most Bible versions is the Greek 'aplous', which means 'simple', or 'honest', perhaps 'sincere'. As soon as we read this in Greek it is obvious that Jesus is not talking about the eye in a physical sense, so to translate this word as 'healthy' seems to me to lead the reader in the wrong direction. Neither does the word 'good' suffice, because it is too loose and does not of itself give the flavour of what Jesus says. In order to try and convey His meaning I cannot find one word, so I have opted for the phrase, *'good and honest'*. This opens the door for the reader to explore the ideas of sincerity and simplicity found in the saying.

## **Further Comments**

### **Some examples of getting this wrong**

In preparation for this study I read an otherwise very helpful commentary, which interprets this passage with the words I have written after this paragraph. They are an example of how to fail to deal with this scripture properly.

*'When the eye is reacting to light in the normal manner, the whole body gets the benefit. A man can perform almost any bodily function when he has good illumination. But if his eyes are impaired so that he cannot make use of the light, almost every function is impaired.'* (Luke – Leon Morris – Tyndale commentary)

Many a blind person would strongly disagree! Moreover, I know of Christians who are blind, and who nevertheless have acutely good bodily senses and strength, and also great spiritual strength. The author of this commentary has unfortunately released his most unfortunate

prejudices by not thinking clearly about what is going on here in this passage of Scripture, and by not reflecting on the difference between what we think about the eye today, and what people thought of it in times past.

### ***Biblical examples of the function of the eye***

We can find within Scripture a number of examples of what the people of Israel thought about eyes and sight.

1. Food described as '*pleasing to the eye*' (Genesis 2:9, 3:6)
2. Prophetic insight is described as '*seeing clearly*' (Numbers 24:3f.)
3. Saul is described as having a '*jealous eye*' watching over David (1 Samuel 18:9)
4. The psalms and other writings describe malicious character as observable in someone's '*eye*' (Psalm 35:19, Proverbs 16:30)
5. Proverbs speaks of the use of the '*eye*' to mock others (Proverbs 30:17)
6. Isaiah speaks enigmatically of those who have an '*eye for evil*' (Isaiah 29:20)

Together, these quotes from Scripture give us a rich canvas of literature with which to understand what people thought about the '*eye*' in ancient times. It seems that the eye could be associated with almost any form of human activity or behaviour, and by speaking of the eye, people were referring in some way to individual character or characteristics.

### ***'Look carefully, then, at whether the light in you is darkness' (11:35)***

This is Jesus message of concern, addressed to the people who were following Him at this point. Jesus had just been expressing concern at the failure of His fellow countrymen to respond to the message of God's love, offered to them in the form of His miracles, signs and wonders (11:27-32). His conclusion seems to be that their '*eyes*' are somehow evil, and they have not allowed the light to penetrate into their bodies where it might illuminate them.

With this in mind, should we interpret Jesus' first comment about not hiding a light under a bowl as Jesus' comment on the works of the Father? God does not hide Jesus under a bowl – His work is to be shown to the nations on the Cross of Calvary, as Jesus now knows (9:22,44), it is not to be kept for the Jewish people alone. Moreover, God looks for people who will receive the light of His revelation in honest truth and simplicity, for this is the only way that darkness will be dispelled (11:34-36)

### ***The dwelling place and the body***

This is a relatively small point, but in verse 33, Jesus speaks about a light illuminating the whole of a dwelling place. Then in the rest of this passage, He speaks about light illuminating a body, by means of the eye. Logically, Jesus juxtaposes the idea of '*a dwelling place*' with '*body*' as if the body is the dwelling place not so much of the soul (He does not say this exactly), but certainly of someone's personality and individuality.

Of course, it was only a short time before the early Christians would discover a new way of speaking about Jesus' personal presence with them as a community of believers; they described themselves as the dwelling place of God, by calling the church the '*body of Christ*' (1 Cor. 10:16, 12:12f.).

---

# Discipleship

## ***Application***

### ***The light of Christ***

After doing this study, I have come to the personal conclusion that this passage is not really about how we shine our light into the dark world. It is about the Light of Christ shining in the world, and shining into our personal lives. This is quite different. With the popular view of this passage (shining our light into the world), Jesus' teaching would seem to present us with a command to make sure that we can be seen. With this different interpretation (about the Light of Christ), the work of shining in the world is God's, and He has already made Jesus shine as brightly as can be, through His death and resurrection. The light is in fact there for all who will see it to respond. Our challenge is identified by Jesus in the later verses (11:34f.), to make sure that we are receiving the true Light of Christ into ourselves and being completely illuminated. The true light of Christ allows no darkness!

Of course, much will flow from allowing the full Light of Christ to flow through our lives, and God will undoubtedly use those who have His light within them to do His work in the world. I reckon that the message of this for preachers today is not to simply encourage Christians to 'get out there and shine for Jesus'. It is to encourage Christians to make sure 'the light within them is truly light and not darkness'. God will take care of the rest.

### ***Seeing and perceiving***

It is good that scripture reminds us here about the fact that we can see in other people's eyes something of what they are experiencing. Firstly, we should not be so ignorant as to assume that people around us will not read us as they interact with us; we all do this and it should come as no surprise. Whether we read people accurately is another question, because plainly, sometimes we do and sometimes we don't; and more specifically, we read some people well and others not so well.

Instead of becoming rather paranoid about what people think of us or see in us, rather let us ask God to bless our 'eyes'. In this way, two things may happen. Firstly, we can be inspired by God as we look into the eyes of other people and therefore do our best to understand them positively, and for good purposes, perhaps to be able to help. Secondly we can do our best to present ourselves accurately and well to others, so that when they look into our eyes, we do not give false signals. Such honesty and integrity in human affairs is not a personality trait, it can be a gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:8,9f.).

### ***The evicting of darkness***

The glorious truth of this passage is that in Jesus' example here, darkness is eliminated by the presence of light! If we are worried about any darkness that might be in our souls and bodies, then the only sure-fire way of dealing with this is to let Jesus into this part of our lives, so that He does the work of evicting darkness for us. This is a message of hope!

## ***Ideas for what to do***

- There is a certain amount of self examination implied by this passage. At least, we who read this should examine ourselves as to whether our 'eye' is 'good and honest', and whether the 'light' within us is enlightening the whole of our lives, body soul and spirit. Try to make sense of these different aspects of what Jesus says within your own life.

- Ask yourself these things. In what ways is the Light of Christ visible in the world today? Does God want us to make His light more visible? Think about them carefully. I do not want to imply any answer to these questions because we should each consider them for ourselves.

### **Questions (for use in groups)**

1. What does this passage of scripture say to you about the light that must illuminate your life? How do we gain that light?
2. What does Scripture mean by the phrase '*the lamp of your body is your eye*' and what is Jesus' message here?
3. What sort of '*light*' may indeed be '*darkness*' (11:35), according to Jesus in this passage?

---

## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, shine Your light into my life, so that my whole being is filled with Your light. Dispel the darkness that has been within me and flood my soul with Your glorious presence, so I may live to praise Your name forever. **AMEN**

---