

Light exposes what is hidden. It breaks through the darkness. It reveals both the good and the bad. Those who hate the light avoid the light, because they don't want their evil deeds to be exposed for what they are. But those who love the truth step into the light, and it shows that their deeds have been carried out in God.

St. Paul tells us that we are children of the light. This means that we have been born from God. By his Holy Spirit, he has given us a new birth and a new life by the washing of our baptism. He has anointed us, joining us to the death of Christ where all our sins were carried, and he causes us to rise with Christ in his resurrection like newborn children. As children of the light, we live in the light of God's Word. We know that the light exposes our sin, but we have confidence that Christ has made atonement for our sin. We therefore wait for Christ's appearing with an open awareness of our own weaknesses and confidence in God's compassion through his Son.

The light exposes what is hidden. It exposes our sins. It keeps us from living a lie. Instead, it makes us honest about ourselves. Those who hate the light are not honest about themselves. They want to hide their sins in the darkness as they take comfort in their own passions. But they are never at rest. Even when they doze off and lull themselves to sleep with their own happy thoughts, they can't avoid the day of the Lord, which will come like a thief in the night. No one can sleep through the arrival of the true Light who will wake up all the dead and make clear what everyone has done and thought.

This is terrifying, isn't it? But God has not called us to live in terror. While we certainly feel the terror of God's judgment, God does not use it to drive us to despair. Instead, he keeps us sober. He keeps us mindful and watchful, always thinking about his arrival. St. Paul therefore assures us, "God didn't appoint us to be punished by his anger but to be saved by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us." This remains the superscription written on our hearts and minds, "Jesus crucified for me is my life, my hope's foundation, and my glory and salvation."

Jesus gives this parable of the Ten Virgins as a warning specifically to the children of God. He warns us against the folly of not keeping our lamps filled with oil. The oil is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ, who alone remains our constant hope and light in this dark world. The light in our lamps is the faith in our hearts, which embraces Christ who freely forgives us of our sins and bestows on us his own righteousness and life. This faith also shines with hope, which always waits and longs for Christ to shine on us, both in our earthly life well as in the hour of his appearing. It also shines with love as we bear with one another, support one another, encourage one another, and follow the example of our Savior. It shines with the zeal for God's truth.

That light of faith, hope, and love cannot continue to burn in our lamps without the oil of the Holy Spirit. It can't survive without the gospel. The darkness of sin and temptation is always trying to dim what the gospel of Jesus Christ causes to shine.

As children of the light, we know how patient and kind our Lord is. We know that he will not put out a dimly burning wick. He won't condemn us for having a weak faith. Yet, at the same time, we also know how quickly a dimly burning wick can go out when it doesn't have oil. If you recognize that your faith is weak, then you should recognize your constant need for hearing the Word of God, being corrected by the law, comforted by the gospel, and strengthened by the body and blood of Christ.

If you try to figure out how you can have the bare minimum of burning faith in order to escape God's judgment, then you are thinking like a fool. A child of the light doesn't calculate and measure out how much oil he thinks he has left, like you would when you see the empty light flash on your car while you're driving. No, God calls us to be wise. In other words, he calls us to recognize our need for his oil at all times. Our faith doesn't come from ourselves. It comes from the gospel truth of Christ, which he freely declares to us by his Holy Spirit.

You aren't wise because of your own intellect. Perhaps a better word than wise might be prudent or mindful. The five virgins who bring extra oil with them are mindful. They think about what they need. They know the foolishness of their own hearts. They therefore don't trust in their lamps to just keep burning. So you can't trust in your heart to just keep believing. You need the oil of the gospel.

The foolish virgins are those who trust their lamps to keep burning. The less their lamps burn, the more they adjust their eyes to the darkness until the light is completely gone. Then they are no different than those who hide in the darkness, afraid to come into the light lest their evil deeds be exposed.

All ten virgins fall asleep. What does this falling asleep represent? It could represent the fact that we all die, waiting for the last day as we sleep in our graves. That's certainly true. By the time these ten virgins fell asleep, they were as good as judged. There was nothing more to do. Either they would wake up to joy or terror, either having oil or no oil. Now, while you are living, before the time appointed for you to die and the time appointed for Christ's return – now in this day of salvation – is the time for hearing the gospel. But after this time passes, that gospel will be nowhere to be found. The stores will all be closed, and the church bells will no longer be ringing. Only those whose lamps are burning in the hope of Christ's return will be welcomed into his kingdom. So be watchful now while you are still alive, because when you die it will be too late.

The fact that all ten of them fell asleep also brings to mind that all of us fall short. We all slip into our own foolish thoughts, words, and behavior. Even the children of the light fall prey to temptations. We underestimate the dangers of sin. We get things wrong, even falling for subtle errors and false teachings about Christ.

But again, if you try to figure out how much you can sin or how many errors you can believe without losing your faith, then you are thinking like a fool. Can you snap at your brother or be cruel to your sister? Can you look at perverted pictures and videos? Can you go so far with your girlfriend when no one is watching? Can you sulk and feel sorry for yourself as you secretly harbor anger toward those who have harmed you? Can you put a little bit of water in your gas tank and still be able to drive down the road? Maybe. But what a foolish way to think! Instead, repent of your cruelty, your lust, and your self-pity and anger! Let the light of God's Word expose your sin. Turn from your foolish ways, and rely on the oil of Christ who, by his everlasting Spirit, offered himself up for you to wash you clean from a bad conscience so that you can serve the living God!

The same goes with false doctrine. Can someone still have faith if he doesn't understand the saving power of baptism? Can you still believe if you only go to church once a month or every three months? Perhaps. But what a silly way to think! In your baptism, you were crucified to this way of thinking. You are a child of the light. So flee the errors of this darkened world, and walk in the light of the Lord!

In other words, stay awake. Be aware that the judgment is coming. Yes, this means that you will often feel the terror of God's judgment. But that's only your old Adam dying. God is simply teaching you humility. He's teaching you to be honest. Be honest about your need for the gospel. Because this is the beginning of wisdom. It is to fear God, recognizing that there is forgiveness in no one else than in Jesus Christ.

Any darkness you sense in your own lamp is no match for the light Christ himself provides. He has faced the darkness with an honest heart, obedient in every way you fell short, watchful in every way you fell asleep. He died for your sins and was raised again to declare you righteous. He has brought life and immortality to light through his gospel, anointing you with his Holy Spirit. He continues to provide the oil of gladness for you through the same promise of your baptism. This means, that whether you are awake or asleep, your life is secured in him.

You can therefore be honest about the weakness of your faith. There is no shame in admitting that you often stumble and tremble in this dark earthly life, that your hope for the future is often clouded by thoughts of despair, or that your love for your fellow Christians is often challenged by feelings of resentment. There is no shame in admitting your sin, which still wages war against your soul. The darkness of your flesh still tries to overcome the light in your lamp. Don't be afraid to admit this. Confess it. Plead guilty of it. There is no shame in being honest about it, because the blood and righteousness of Christ still avails for you, and God's grace still shines on you.

So put on faith and love as a breastplate and the sure hope of salvation as your helmet. Because God has not appointed you for wrath and condemnation, but for salvation through Jesus Christ. He remains the one who died for your sins. He remains your risen Savior so that you may always live in him. Therefore, take comfort in this truth, and continue to encourage and strengthen one another in it. Amen.