

Light Work

Luke 11:33-36

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Each parable makes its own point, but the two are welded together in v 36. Starting from the situation of inner illumination produced by well-functioning eyes, the verse traces this inward shining light back to its ultimate source in the external lamp upon its stand. The light as it shines into a person's life brings both salvation and moral transformation

Jesus often taught His disciples through parables. Because they had been listening to Him they had **light** shining **on** them (v. 36). Thus they should share that **light** (v. 33). When a person's eyes (like lamps) react properly to **light**, he can function normally. Being receptive to Jesus' teachings would show that they were **full of light** (vv. 34, 36) and were benefiting from His teachings (cf. comments on 8:16–18)

This analogy likens Jesus' preaching to the provision of light in order that people might see how to become part of God's kingdom

The first little parable makes the point that the ministry of Jesus is no hidden and obscure thing. It shines out brightly for all who would find their way by means of its brightness.

Body:

I. **Lighting (Placement) v.33**

- a. Lighting a Lamp
 - i. Lighting - to cause illumination or burning to take place, light, kindle
 - 1. Light imagery has been used in connection with Jesus already by Luke in 2:32 and cf. 1:78–79.
 - ii. Lamp – oil burning
 - 1. In 8:16 the lamp that has been lit is the one who has heard the word of God from Jesus and responded to it. The verse contains a mission challenge
- b. Puts it away
 - i. In a cellar
 - 1. Into a vault, crypt, cellar
 - 2. since a cellar is the very place where a light would be required—unless the point is that a light in the cellar offers no illumination in

the main part of the house. The point is simply that the light is placed in a hidden location

3.

ii. Under a basket

1. Wicker

2. Alternatively, the lamp may be placed under a measuring vessel

3. This may have been used to extinguish the light, so that its fumes would not spread through the room

c. Lampstand

i. Lampstand – upon which lamps were placed or hung

1. Since lamps were the normal source of light other than daylight in the biblical world, one would expect stands to hold them to have been items of everyday usage

2. The widespread acquaintance with lamps and stands is the basis of Jesus allusion to the obvious rule that if a lamp is to give its full illumination it must be set on a stand and not irrationally placed under a bed or covered with a bushel

3.

ii. May see the Light

1. The presence of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus is like a lamp shining out for all to see. But only sound eyesight allows the light to come from the lamp and illuminate every part of life.

II. Light Source v.34

a. Eye is the Lamp

i. Eye- organ of sense perception

1. **Your eye.** This refers to one's spiritual vision or openness to God's word, i.e., Jesus' teaching.

2. that light is given to the body by the eye which acts as a lamp to the interior in the sense that light enters the body by it; the eye is thought of as receiving light from outside the body

3. the eye is spoken of as a lamp, but is in its turn a relatively transparent metaphor for moral and spiritual readiness to see

4.

ii. Your body - meaning passes from the eye of the body to the eye of the soul

b. Eye is Clear

i. Body full of light

1. ***shining, bright, radiant***

ii. Clear- Healthy

1. ἀπλοῦς means 'simple, single, sincere' can mean 'healthy'. The meaning 'generous' fits the context in
2. If the eye is healthy and lets in light, i.e. if the person is single-mindedly receptive to the light of the gospel, then his whole being will be filled with light
3. On its health depends whether the blessings of light come to man. We must be fully open to the light of Jesus, or of the Gospel
4. Luke taught that they must respond with "good eyes," i.e., with true faith and obedience. It was their responsibility to rid themselves of any possible obstruction and to receive the word with a noble and good heart. Only thus could they persevere and produce fruit (8:15). Then their light, a reflection of the light of their Lord, would shine out to others.
5. 34–36 make it clear that the light shines out from Jesus' own ministry, which is no hidden phenomenon, but is available to cast its light upon those who wish to find their way inside (the imagery is explored more fully at 8:16).
6. clear") is lit. "single." The word is used in moral contexts in connection with sincerity, wholeheartedness, guilelessness, and generosity, but is found in connection with eyes meaning "clear," "sound," or "healthy

c. Eye is bad

i. Body full of Darkness

1. πονηρός will then mean 'in poor condition, sick'; the sense 'grudging' (Mt. 6:23; s probably too specific here the thought is of refusal to receive the gospel.
2. Bad – evil , This happens when the eye of the soul is so diseased that it cannot receive any ray of
3. Faith, when diseased, becomes the darkness of superstition; just as the eye, when diseased, distorts and obscures. Comp. Mt 6:22, 23.
4. metaphor of moral depravity and spiritual ignorance
5. This happens when the eye of the soul is so diseased that it cannot receive any ray of Divine truth

6. Faith, when diseased, becomes the darkness of superstition; just as the eye, when diseased, distorts and obscures. Comp. Mt 6:22, 23.
7. On the negative side, πονηρός (tr. above “diseased”) is the normal word for “evil” or “wicked,” but in connection with eyes the noun form is documented to mean “disease” and more generally the adverb is used in the idiom πονηρῶς ἔχειν where the sense is “to be ill.

III. Light it Up v.35-36

- a. Consider
 - i. introduced by σκοπέω ‘to look out, to consider’ (Rom. 6:17; 2 Cor. 4:18; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 2:4; 3:17
 - ii. Whether Light or Darkness inside
 - iii. hearers are bidden to examine whether what they think to be light is really darkness (cf. Jn. 9:40f.). For the thought of light within a person see Pr. 20:27.
 - iv.
- b. Full of Light
 - i. No Dark Part
 1. Even as the whole person becomes filled with light upon acceptance of Jesus and his teaching, so does darkness fall upon those who reject him.
 2. ‘If, however, your whole body is lighted up, with no part dark, then all about you will be light; just as the lamp lights you with its brightness’. Taken in this way, the verse refers to the light-giving quality of those who have been illuminated by Jesus and gives an equivalent to Mt. 5:14
 - ii. Wholly Illumined
 1. Complete illumination is illumination indeed, and those who possess it have no need of a sign from heaven in order to recognize the truth
 2. “If you are truly receptive to Christ (v. 36a) and there is no hardness of heart in you toward him and his message (v. 36b), then you will truly shine with the light of Christ and his gospel (v. 36c); just like when a shining light illuminates you with its rays, so will Christ illumine you”

iii. Lamp Illumines with rays

Word Studies

Lighting - **to cause illumination or burning to take place, *light, kindle***¹

Light - Oil-burning

In Hellenistic times large decorative lampstands were available to the wealthy, and would have been a rare, treasured Palestinian import. The home of a Hellenized Jewish family might have tall, elegant metal stands designed in styles reminiscent of their Phoenician origin. Jesus refers to placing a lamp on a stand so that its light may be seen clearly (Mt 5:15; Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16; 11:33). Household lamps and stands differed greatly from the magnificent lampstand in the temple at Jerusalem, and from the gold lamp which hung in the Jewish temple at Heliopolis in Egypt.²

The widespread acquaintance with lamps and stands is the basis of Jesus allusion to the obvious rule that if a lamp is to give its full illumination it must be set on a stand and not irrationally placed under a bed or covered with a bushel.¹⁸ This is used to give point to a law in the spiritual life, Mk. 4:21; Mt. 5:15; Lk. 8:16; 11:33. For all the interrelation of these passages there are differences in detailed form which may not only reflect different stages of the tradition, and show the influence of the contexts in which they are put and the independent interpretations of the Evangelists, but which may also be linked with the fact that Jesus used the comparison on different occasions and in different senses.¹⁹ This makes exposition more difficult, especially as no interpretation is ever appended. One might think of the duty of the disciples to pursue their ministry publicly and not to withhold the glad tidings from any (this interpretation is particularly

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 126.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Lamp, Lampstand,](#)" in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1304.

¹⁸ Exceptions, e.g., the dazzling of a sick person by the lamp (Shab., 2, 5), or the covering of the lamp with a bushel on the Sabbath so that the flame will not catch the beams (16, 7), do not affect the rule. The ref. is obviously to a house with one room (Kl. Mt., *ad loc.*; Galling, ZDPV, *op. cit.*, 34), to simple conditions, and to a stand which is not too big or heavy (as against Zn. Mt.⁴, 205, n. 60 and Lk.^{3, 4}, 344, n. 18).

¹⁹ Cf. Wbg. Mk., 136. Zn. Lk. ^{3, 4}, 344, n. 18 and 469; J. Schniewind, Mk. (NT Deutsch, 1), 76: "Fine examples of the many meanings of an unexplained parable."

suggested in Mt. 5:15; cf. 5:14, where the disciples are called τὸ → φῶς τοῦ κόσμου).²⁰ But one might also think of the tendency towards full outworking and the universal extension of help which is immanent in the Gospel itself.²¹ Nor is it impossible that the reference is to Jesus and His significance or the course of His life (cf. Jn. 1:5; 8:12).²² Lk. adds to 11:33 the parable which is found in another context and a shorter version in Mt. 6:22. In 11:34 He calls the eye the λύχνος τοῦ σώματος. On its health depends whether the blessings of light come to man. We must be fully open to the light of Jesus, or of the Gospel.²³ The admonition in Lk. 12:35: ἑστώσαν ὑμῶν ... οἱ λύχοι καίόμενοι, an obvious figure for constant readiness, reminds us of the situation in the parable in Mt. 25:1 ff.²⁴ The woman in the parable of the lost coin lights a lamp (ἄπτει λύχνον, V 4, p 327 Lk. 15:8) in order to see into all corners of the house. This, too, is a feature which everyone can understand.²⁵³

Basket – wicker

²⁰ In spite of Mt. 5:16, we are not to think of the conduct of the disciples. The admonition that they should not obscure the Gospel, nor get in the way of its operation, is certainly implied, but the main emphasis is on the positive demand. Cf. also → 26.

²¹ That the saying is taken eschatologically by Mk., and refers to the manifestation of the kingdom, cannot be deduced from the ἔρχεται (as against E. Lohmeyer, *Kommentar z. Mk.* [1937], *ad loc.*). Perhaps we should not seek too close a connection with the temporarily concealing character of the parables in Mk. Is more than Israel in view? Cf. Kl. Lk. on 8:16; Schl. Mk., 101 f.

²² Though not in such a way that κρύπτει in Lk. 11:33 refers to the death of Jesus in the sense of sepulchre, and the whole saying to His resurrection, by which He, and with Him His Gospel, come to light again (so Zn. Lk.^{3, 4}, 470). → III, 975.

²³ In Lk. there is certainly “an association in terms of λύχνος” (Kl. Lk., *ad loc.*), but Lk. sees a material connection with 11:33: it is man’s fault that, even though the light shines forth, he does not let it affect him. Is this an explanation of Jewish rejection? The parable presents many detailed problems, esp. τὸ → φῶς τὸ ἐν σοί, Lk. 11:35; Mt. 6:23, and the exclusively Lucan conclusion in 11:36, in which λύχνος occurs again.

²⁴ Cf. W. Michaelis, *Es ging ein Sämann aus, zu säen* (1938), 151 f., 174. The ten virgins carry λαμπάδες rather than λύχνοι (Galling, ZDPV, *op. cit.*, 32, “lamps on poles”). λαμπάς is also found in Jn. 18:3; Ac. 20:8 (to illuminate an obviously large upper room); Rev. 4:5; 8:10; → 17 and 26. In Jn. 18:3 we find φανός, “lantern.” In Phil. 2:15 (cf. Da. 12:3) φωστήρ is used for “lampstand,” though it means “light” in Rev. 21:11. On these partial synonyms cf. Trench, 96 ff. (§ 28: φῶς, φέγγος, φωστήρ, λύχνος, λαμπάς), also → n. 10. The plur. (λύχνοι) is found only in Lk. 12:35.

²⁵ This passage, with Mt. 5:15, is rightly claimed as evidence that the custom that private houses should have an everlasting lamp was not followed in Judaism at this time. Cf. Galling, ZDPV, *op. cit.*, 34; Krauss, I, 404, n. 224.

³ Wilhelm Michaelis, “[Λύχνος, Λυχνία](#),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 326–327.

Cellar - Into a vault, crypt, cellar

Lampstand - upon which lamps were placed or hung⁴

Since lamps were the normal source of light other than daylight in the biblical world, one would expect stands to hold them to have been items of everyday usage⁵

See

Eye – **eye as organ of sense perception**⁶

Faith, when diseased, becomes the darkness of superstition; just as the eye, when diseased, distorts and obscures. Comp. Mt 6:22, 23.

Lamp

Body- meaning passes from the eye of the body to the eye of the soul

Clear – Healthy

Bad – evil , This happens when the eye of the soul is so diseased that it cannot receive any ray of

Full of Light - **shining, bright, radiant**

Divine truth

Darkness - metaphor of moral depravity and spiritual ignorance⁷

Full

Illumined – full of light Complete illumination is illumination indeed, and those who possess it have no need of a sign from heaven in order to recognize the truth

Rays

33. λύχνον ἄψας. See on 8:16.—εἰς κρύπτην. “Into a vault, crypt, cellar.” But no ancient Version seems to give this rendering, although Euthym. has τὴν ἀπόκρυφον οἰκίαν. Win. 34:3. b, P. 298. For the word comp. Jos. *B. J.* v. 7, 4; Athen. 5. (4.) 205 A; and the lat. *crypta*; Suet. *Cal.* 58.; Juv. v. 106.

⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 606.

⁵ Carol Meyers, [“Lampstand,”](#) in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 141.

⁶ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 744.

⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [“Darkness,”](#) in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 581.

Euthym. Euthymius Zigabenus.

Win. Winer, *Grammar of N.T. Greek* (the page refers to Moulton’s edition).

Jos. Josephus.

ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον. “Under *the* bushel,” *i.e.* the one in the room, or in the house; as we say “*the* sofa, *the* shovel.” In capacity a *modius* is about a peck = 16 *sextarii* or 1/6 μέδιμος (comp. Nep. Att. ii.): elsewhere only Mt. 5:15; Mk. 4:21. Syr-Sin. omits.

34. ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματος. “The *lamp* of the body.” To translate λύχνος “*candle*” in ver. 33 and “*light*” in ver. 34 (Tyn. Cov. Cran. Gen. AV.) is disastrous. Vulg. has *lucerna* in both; Wic. has “*lanterne*” in both, and Rhem. “*candel*” in both; RV. still better, “*lamp*” in both. D. C. G. art. “*Light*.”

ὅταν ... ἐπ’άν. See on ver. 22. Here both are followed by the subj., and there is no appreciable difference.

ἄλοῦς. “Free from distortion, normal, sound.”—πονηρός. “Diseased”: πονηρία ὀφθαλμῶν occurs Plat. *Hip. min.* 374 D. Comp. πονηρὰ ἕξις σώματος (Plat. *Tim.* 86 D) and the common phrase πονηρῶς ἔχει. Faith, when diseased, becomes the darkness of superstition; just as the eye, when diseased, distorts and obscures. Comp. Mt 6:22, 23.

35. σκόπει οὖν. Here, and not in the middle of ver. 34, the meaning passes from the eye of the body to the eye of the soul.¹

μὴ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν. This happens when the eye of the soul is so diseased that it cannot receive any ray of Divine truth. The μὴ is interrogative, and the indicative after it suggests that the case contemplated is an actual fact: “look whether it be not darkness”; *considera num, schaue ob wahl nicht*. The *vide ne* of Vulg. is not exact. Comp. Gal. 4:11; Thuc. 3, 53:2. Win. lii. 2, a, p. 631; Simcox, *Lang. of N.T.* p. 109.

36. The tautology is only apparent. In the protasis the emphasis is on ὅλον, which is further explained by μὴ ἔχον μέρος τι σκοτινόν: in the apodosis the emphasis is on φωτινόν, which is further explained by ὡς ὅταν ὁ λύχνος κ.τ.λ. “If thy *whole* body ... it shall be wholly *full of light*.”

Syr Syriac.

Sin. Sinaitic.

Tyn. Tyndale.

Cov. Coverdale.

Gen. Geneva.

AV. Authorized Version.

Vulg. Vulgate.

Wic. Wiclif.

Rhem. Rheims (or Douay).

RV. Revised Version.

D D. Cod. Bezae, saec. vi. Given by Beza to the University Library at Cambridge 1581. Greek and Latin. Contains the whole Gospel.

¹ Comp. Seneca, *Effugisse tenebras, bono lucis frui, non tenui visu clare prospicere, sed totum diem admittere*.

Vulg. Vulgate.

Win. Winer, *Grammar of N.T. Greek* (the page refers to Moulton’s edition).

Complete illumination is illumination indeed, and those who possess it have no need of a sign from heaven in order to recognize the truth. Syr-Sin. condenses.⁸

Commentary Studies

(33) Luke's wording of the parable is close to 8:16 but closer still to Mt. 5:15. It is hard to say whether the third person singular form is secondary as compared with the plural in Mt. 5:15 (cf. G. Schneider*, 184f.; Schulz, 474 n. 553; but see F. Hahn*, 111 n. 11). ἄπτω is Lucan (8:16 note). Luke has a new element in his use of κρύπτη**. This refers to a hidden, and hence dark place. This is often taken to refer to the cellar which would form part of a substantial Hellenistic house (Dodd, *Parables*, 106 n. 32) in contrast to the one-roomed Galilean peasant's cottage. This is doubtful, since a cellar is the very place where a light would be required—unless the point is that

Syr Syriac.

Sin. Sinaitic.

⁸ Alfred Plummer, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*](#), International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 308–309.

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a light in the cellar offers no illumination in the main part of the house. The point is simply that the light is placed in a hidden location; the phrase may be a Lucan variant for ὑποκάτω κλινῆς (8:16). Alternatively, the lamp may be placed under a measuring vessel. μόδιος (Mt. 5:15; Mk. 4:21**; diff. Lk. 8:16 σκεῦος) is a peck measure (8.75 litres), but the word can be used for any similar vessel (Jeremias, *Abba*, 101). This may have been used to extinguish the light, so that its fumes would not spread through the room (Jeremias, *ibid.*, with rabbinic parallels; *pace* Derrett, 192 n. 3, whose reconstruction of the background in terms of the Hanukkah festival is not convincing). The phrase οὐδὲ ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον, however, is textually uncertain in Lk., being omitted by $\mathfrak{P}^{45} \mathfrak{P}^{75} L \Xi 0124 f1 700 al sy^s sa$; (UBS); *Diglot*; NEB; it could be due to assimilation to the parallels, but the structure of Mk. 4:21 suggests that the original wording had two phrases, as here (of which Matthew has omitted one; cf. Metzger, 159). In place of φῶς, a number of authorities ($\mathfrak{P}^{45} A W 33 pm$; TR; *Synopsis*; *Diglot*) have φέγγος (Mt. 24:29 par. Mk. 13:24**), ‘light, radiance’; the UBS reading may be an assimilation to 8:16. For the significance of the parable, see introduction. Its authenticity is indisputable (F. Hahn*, 112f.; *pace* Bultmann, 102, 107).

(34) In the second saying we have a different use and application of the term λύχνος. Here it is stated that light is given to the body by the eye which acts as a lamp to the interior in the sense that light enters the body by it; the eye is thought of as receiving light from outside the body (F. Hahn*, 126f.). The saying is not to be understood with crass literalness, since ‘body’ can mean the personality as a whole, especially in the phrase ‘the whole body’ in Aramaic (Manson, *Sayings*, 93, following G. Dalman). Two alternatives are presented. Matthew has preserved the parallelism better with ἐάν ... ἐάν ...; Luke is not over-fond of ἐάν (Mt., 66x; Mk., 39x; Lk., 29x; Acts, 11x) and has replaced it by ὅταν ... ἐπάν ... (cf. 11:22; *contra* Schulz, 468f.) ἀπλοῦς means ‘simple, single, sincere’. It can thus mean ‘generous’ (Pr. 11:25; cf. Rom. 12:8). The corresponding

** All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

f1 Family 1 (Lake)

UBS *The Greek New Testament* (3rd edition), United Bible Societies, London, 1976)

Diglot Luke: A Greek-English Diglot for the Use of Translators (British and Foreign Bible Society, London, 1962; this work incorporates the projected 3rd edition of the BFBS text of the Greek New Testament prepared by G. D. Kilpatrick)

NEB *New English Bible*

TR *Theologische Rundschau*

Synopsis K. Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, Stuttgart, 1964 (cited as giving the text of E. Nestle-K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Stuttgart, 1963²⁵)

Diglot Luke: A Greek-English Diglot for the Use of Translators (British and Foreign Bible Society, London, 1962; this work incorporates the projected 3rd edition of the BFBS text of the Greek New Testament prepared by G. D. Kilpatrick)

par. is parallel to

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Hebrew and Aramaic terms (*tāmîm* and *šēlîl*) can mean ‘healthy’. The meaning ‘generous’ fits the context in Mt. 6:22f., and corresponds to the antonym πονηρός which can mean ‘malicious, grudging’. But, although this thought would have been congenial to Luke, there is no evidence of its presence here. We should probably take ἀπλοῦς as an over-literal translation of an Aramaic word, perhaps with a contrast to the idea of ‘double vision’; the metaphorical sense of ‘whole-hearted, single-minded’ (T. Iss. 3:4; 4:6) is basic in the application (cf. O. Bauernfeind, TDNT I, 386; C. Edlund*, 19–79; Schulz, 470). If the eye is healthy and lets in light, i.e. if the person is single-mindedly receptive to the light of the gospel, then his whole being will be filled with light (φωτεινός, ‘shining’, ‘illuminated’; 11:36; Mt. 6:22; 17:15**). πονηρός will then mean ‘in poor condition, sick’; the sense ‘grudging’ (Mt. 6:23; cf. G. Harder, TDNT VI, 55f.) is probably too specific here (cf. W. Michaelis, TDNT V, 377). The thought is of refusal to receive the gospel.

(35) The application is now made. In Mt. 6:23b the saying functions as a warning, but in Lk. it has become an exhortation, introduced by σκοπέω ‘to look out, to consider’ (Rom. 6:17; 2 Cor. 4:18; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 2:4; 3:17**). μή with the indicative is interrogative and means ‘whether’. The hearers are bidden to examine whether what they think to be light is really darkness (cf. Jn. 9:40f.). For the thought of light within a person see Pr. 20:27. Jeremias, *Parables*, 163, suggests that σκότος is a mistranslation of Aramaic *h^ašāḳ* which can mean ‘dark’ as well as ‘darkness’, but this is unnecessary.

(36) This verse is peculiar to Lk., but it forms an antithesis to Mt. 6:23b; hence it is probable that Mt. 6:23b is original as compared with Lk. 11:35 and that Lk. 11:36 stems from Q. Its difficulty may have led to its omission by Matthew, and has caused confusion in the MS tradition. The verse takes up the alternative to v. 35, namely the situation when a person’s whole being is full of light, without any dark patch. μέρος is ‘part’ (12:46; 15:12; 24:42*; cf. Acts 5:2). If the μή ἔχων ... phrase is repetitious, the apodosis seems positively tautologous when it states that the body will be wholly light, just as when the light illuminates (φωτίζω*) a person with its rays (ἀστράπη, 10:18). 1. Manson, *Sayings*, 94, adopts the suggestion of mistranslation of an Aramaic original propounded by C. C. Torrey. The word *kōllā*, translated as an adjective (‘whole’) in the protasis, should be translated as a noun (‘the whole’, i.e. ‘the world’) in the apodosis and made the subject: ‘If, however, your whole body is lighted up, with no part dark, then all about you will be light; just

TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (translated by G. W. Bromiley), Grand Rapids, 1964–76

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* All the occurrences of the word in Lk. are listed (in some cases, all the occurrences in Acts are similarly noted).

as the lamp lights you with its brightness'. Taken in this way, the verse refers to the light-giving quality of those who have been illuminated by Jesus and gives an equivalent to Mt. 5:14 (cf. G. Thomas 24). 2. The saying has been interpreted of people who have not seen Jesus and yet have light within themselves: 'When your body is completely light (through the "inner light"), then it is of itself just as light as when the lamp illuminates it with its brightness'. Those who do not have the good fortune to see the light (i.e. Jesus) can still be 'bright' provided that their inner light is in good order (J. Weiss, 467, with considerable hesitation). 3. 'If the heart is truly receptive of light, it will receive light from the true light when it shines, that is from Christ' (Is. 60:1; Creed, 164; cf. Zahn, 475f.; Schlatter, 517–519). F. Hahn*, 129–131, offers a variant of this view when he argues that the person who is illuminated now by the light which comes from Jesus (v. 33) will experience the full revelation of God's light at the consummation (cf. the use of ἔσται, a real future); the ὡς ὅταν clause must also refer to the future). Since in v. 36a the body is already wholly light, the reference in v. 36b must be future, and Hahn's explanation gains in plausibility, although it must be confessed that the saying is so obscurely expressed that it is hard to be certain of its meaning.⁹

33 For Luke's sources here see at 8:16–18. The εἰς κρύπτην (lit. "into a hidden place"; used of cellars, crypts, and vaults, and perhaps here of some kind of wall recess; cf. Fitzmyer, 940: "crevice") is distinctive here. It is probably nothing more than a Lukan ornamental variation of a detail of the imagery from the wording he used in 8:16 (which is largely repeated here). In 8:16 the lamp that has been lit is the one who has heard the word of God from Jesus and responded to it. The verse contains a mission challenge. Here, however, the sequence from vv 29–32 and the sequel in vv 34–36 make it clear that the light shines out from Jesus' own ministry, which is no hidden phenomenon, but is available to cast its light upon those who wish to find their way inside (the imagery is explored more fully at 8:16). This second application is more likely to reflect

* The work cited is listed in the bibliography at the end of the introduction to the relevant section of the commentary.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, [*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 488–490.

lit. literally

the original use of this mini-parable. Light imagery has been used in connection with Jesus already by Luke in 2:32 and cf. 1:78–79.

34 Luke has made a number of minor stylistic changes to his source here (see Matt 6:22), the most obvious of which are the preference for ὅταν ... ἐπάν, “when ... when,” over Matthew’s ἐάν ... ἐάν, “if ... if”; the addition of some transitional uses of καί (here, “then”); a present tense for Matthew’s logical future (note the present tense of Matt 6:23, and conversely Luke’s use of this future in v 36); and the trimming away of words Luke judged to be repetitive (only the loss of ὅλον, “whole,” from the darkening of the body might affect the meaning: partial sight is a possibility in the Lukan text).

There are two layers of metaphor here: the eye is spoken of as a lamp, but is in its turn a relatively transparent metaphor for moral and spiritual readiness to see. (It is difficult to see how Dupont [“La transmission,” 229] can say, “Taken together, these four verses [vv 33–36, separated off from their Lukan context] reveal no other preoccupation than that of an ethical instruction on the good example that the believer is called to give to those around him.”) The lamp metaphor may be more readily appreciated in the context of ancient Greek views of sight as involving a flow of light out from the eye to mingle with the light of the object under scrutiny, and thence to return via the eye into the body of the beholder (see Plato, *Timaeus*, 45B–46A and the summary in Delebecque, *Études*, 86, of material from C. Mugler, *Dictionnaire historique de la terminologie optique des Grecs* [Paris: Klincksieck, 1964]; Betz [“Matthew vi.22f,” 43–56] appeals to this Greek view, but rather grandly finds in our text a critique of the entire approach of the Greek philosophical tradition; Allison [NTS 33 (1987) 61–71] has documented the range of Greek views; he confirms that the dominant Greek views agree in treating the eye as a light source, but he also demonstrates that ancient Jewish sources also assume that vision operates on the basis of light originating from the eye). The concern of the image is to demonstrate the power of the privileged part over the whole: it is a comprehensive disaster to the whole that the seeing organ should fail to do its job. Moral and spiritual illumination is not self-terminating, but rather casts its light over the whole of the living out of one’s life. At this point there is no clear indication of the relationship between the lamp of v 33 and that of v 34.

ἁπλοῦς (tr. above “clear”) is lit. “single.” The word is used in moral contexts in connection with sincerity, wholeheartedness, guilelessness, and generosity, but is found in connection with eyes meaning “clear,” “sound,” or “healthy” (probably originally in connection with multiple vision). On the negative side, πονηρός (tr. above “diseased”) is the normal word for “evil” or “wicked,” but in connection with eyes the noun form is documented to mean “disease” (see BAGD, 690) and more generally the adverb is used in the idiom πονηρῶς ἔχειν where the sense is “to be ill.” In the first instance the medical sense should be allowed for both words in the

NTS New Testament Studies

tr. translation, translator(s), translated by, transpose(s)

lit. literally

tr. translation, translator(s), translated by, transpose(s)

BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian*

Literature, ET, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; 2d ed. rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker

(University of Chicago, 1979)

present text, but it is not impossible that the terms have been chosen with one eye also on their moral sense.

35 Matthew ends this brief similitude with a conditional statement rather than the challenge we find here, but eight of the ten words are in common. From Matthew's text one could think of an unfortunate, but irreversible, state of affairs (though in the context Matthew actually does not); in Luke there is rather a challenge to do something about it, if one discovers that the interior is dark rather than light. "The light ... in you" is the light that shines from the eyes inwards into the body. With a diseased eye, where this light should be is only darkness.

36 Matthew has no equivalent to v 36. In its present form, its function is clearly to pull together the images that have been used in v 33 and vv 34–35. Hahn ("Die Worte," 114–17) has argued that Matt 6:23b and Luke 11:36 (without from "as" to the end of the verse) form together in antithetical parallelism the original conclusion of the similitude of the eye as a lamp. Over against this must be set the following: (i) the parallelism is not especially close; (ii) the ὅλος, "whole," deleted by Luke in v 34 is likely to be connected with the possibility of partial darkening found here (and this phrase has the only vocabulary of v 36 that is not simply repeated exactly from earlier in the similitude [the μέρος τι (lit. "a certain part") found here is used by Luke again at Acts 5:2]); and (iii) the shared εἰ οὖν, "if then," of the parallel parts is likely to be no more than Luke's re-use of the expression he has displaced from v 35. Lukan formulation seems altogether more likely. Only the final clause of v 36 provides a slight pause, because here the imagery of 33 is taken up again, but in a form that echoes the Matthean (original) form and not the Lukan redaction of the final clause. But Luke has shown himself capable of this kind of thing elsewhere (e.g., in 8:11–15, the explanation of the parable of the sower [see there]).

v 36 welds together the similitudes of v 33 and vv 34–35 by taking the beginning point from the first and the terminus from the second (the missing reference to the eye functions hiddenly as what mediates the light from the lamp to the interior of the body). The translation offered above is only one of many possibilities, since the formulation is cryptic and some of the phrasing units uncertain. To avoid any sense of tautology here, Hahn ["Die Worte," 130–32] finds an eschatological correlate to the present shining of the light in v 34, but this is artificial, makes no proper sense of the ὡς ὅταν, "as when," and makes altogether too much of the future tense of ἔσται, "will be." Sjöberg (ST 5 [1951] 98) is right to find in the light image of these verses what he calls "an ethical aspect" and "a salvation aspect."

Explanation

The presence of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus is like a lamp shining out for all to see. But only sound eyesight allows the light to come from the lamp and illuminate every part of life.

The first little parable makes the point that the ministry of Jesus is no hidden and obscure thing. It shines out brightly for all who would find their way by means of its brightness. Juxtaposed is a second parable, which is a challenge about moral and spiritual eyesight. Its point is rather like that of the proverb, "There is none so blind as those who will not see." The metaphorical language

lit. literally

ST *Studia theologica*

here can be better appreciated if we realize that in the Greco-Roman world seeing was thought to involve a flow of a kind of light out from the eye to mingle with the light of the object under scrutiny, and thence to return via the eye into the body of the beholder. The imagery is used here to demonstrate the power of the privileged part over the whole: the whole of life is affected by the functioning, or not, of the eyes. v 35 challenges the hearers to examine whether their eyes are sending light into the body.

The words translated in v 34 as “clear” and “diseased” are also used as moral terms. The first means literally “single” and is used in connection with sincerity, wholeheartedness, guilelessness, and generosity. The second is the normal word for “evil” or “wicked.” It is likely that the words have been deliberately chosen by the Greek translator so that these moral senses can provide some guidance for the application of the parable.

Each parable makes its own point, but the two are welded together in v 36. Starting from the situation of inner illumination produced by well-functioning eyes, the verse traces this inward shining light back to its ultimate source in the external lamp upon its stand. The light as it shines into a person’s life brings both salvation and moral transformation.¹⁰

11:33 In a place where it will be hidden. This is a lengthy but correct way of translating the Greek term *kryptēn*.

Or under a bowl. There is a textual problem here. Two important papyri (P⁴⁵, P⁷⁵) lack this expression. The meaning of the proverb, however, is not greatly affected. Its inclusion simply adds a second example of hiding a lamp.

Those who come in. The same expression appears in 8:16, and a similar one in 18:24, to describe entrance into God’s kingdom.

¹⁰ John Nolland, [Luke 9:21–18:34](#), vol. 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 657–659.

May see the light. This analogy likens Jesus' preaching to the provision of light in order that people might see how to become part of God's kingdom. See comments on 8:16.

11:34 Your eye. This refers to one's spiritual vision or openness to God's word, i.e., Jesus' teaching.

Of your body. This encompasses the whole person (cf. Rom 12:1; Eph 5:28; Phil 1:20).

When your eyes are good. "Good" means *morally healthy*.

When they are bad. "Bad" is literally *evil* or *wicked*. The same word is used in "wicked generation" (11:29).

Your body also is full of darkness. Even as the whole person becomes filled with light upon acceptance of Jesus and his teaching, so does darkness fall upon those who reject him.

11:35 This oxymoron or paradox is intensified by the imperative "see to it." Make sure that what directs your thoughts/life is in fact the true light.

11:36 Although the general sense of this verse is clear, the exact meaning is not. It may mean, "If you are truly receptive to Christ (v. 36a) and there is no hardness of heart in you toward him and his message (v. 36b), then you will truly shine with the light of Christ and his gospel (v. 36c); just like when a shining light illuminates you with its rays, so will Christ illumine you" (v. 36d).

The Lukan Message

Jesus and his words were light to Theophilus and the other readers of this Gospel, and Luke taught that they must respond with "good eyes," i.e., with true faith and obedience. It was their responsibility to rid themselves of any possible obstruction and to receive the word with a noble and good heart. Only thus could they persevere and produce fruit (8:15). Then their light, a reflection of the light of their Lord, would shine out to others. Compare how Matt 5:15–16 makes this thought clearer and more explicit.¹¹

Jesus often taught His disciples through parables. Because they had been listening to Him they had **light** shining **on** them (v. 36). Thus they should share that **light** (v. 33). When a person's eyes (like lamps) react properly to **light**, he can function normally. Being receptive to Jesus' teachings would show that they were **full of light** (vv. 34, 36) and were benefiting from His teachings (cf. comments on 8:16–18)¹²

¹¹ Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 337–338.

¹² John A. Martin, ["Luke,"](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 236–237.