

18. Spiritual Darkness vs. Spiritual Light - Seeing Clearly in a Confused World

Matthew 4:12–17 | Isaiah 9:1–2 | Genesis 3

How Do We Talk About Spiritual Darkness and Light in a Way That's Not Just Subjective?

In today's world, warped ideologies often present themselves as "illumination." People will say, "*I used to be confused, but now I see the truth,*" when what's really happened is they've been radicalized—or drawn into a mindset rooted in fear, hate, pride, or scapegoating.

They mistake **spiritual darkness** for **light**.

This is exactly what Isaiah warns against:

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness..." (*Isaiah 5:20*)

This is why we must go deeper than feelings.

It's not enough for something to feel clarifying or empowering. **We must discern whether it aligns with the person and mission of Jesus.**

This Pattern Goes Back to Genesis: The First False Light

This temptation—this confusion between light and darkness, good and evil—*starts in the Garden*. Genesis 3 shows us the **original pattern of spiritual deception**:

"The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it..." (*Genesis 3:6*)

Let's break that down:

- **She saw** it was good — *or so it seemed*
- **She took** what was forbidden
- And what followed? **Everything unraveled**

It looked beautiful. It promised wisdom. It felt empowering. But it was false light.

This is the pattern that repeats in every generation:

1. We see something that *seems* good
2. We take it
3. It leads us away from God, from others, and from ourselves

Jesus, in the desert, *reverses* this pattern. He **sees** the temptation, **refuses** to take it, and everything begins to be restored.

In the Garden, Adam and Eve reach for false light.

In the wilderness, Jesus *resists* false light.

In Galilee, he *becomes* the true light for those who sit in darkness.

So when we talk about seeing clearly, we must remember: **not everything that looks good is good.**

True spiritual light doesn't just look appealing. It's aligned with *God's heart* and bears *God's fruit*.

Spiritual Temptation: When Evil Masquerades as Good

In Matthew 4:1–11, Satan tempts Jesus with Scripture. He uses *truth-shaped lies*. This is key:

The enemy often disguises darkness as light.

Temptation isn't always obvious. It often comes dressed as:

- Righteous anger
- Clear purpose
- National or religious identity
- Emotional belonging

But if it pulls us away from humility, mercy, and love, it's not from God.

What Is Spiritual Darkness? What Is Spiritual Light?

Spiritual darkness can include:

- Feeling lost, directionless, or numb
- Believing harmful lies about ourselves or others
- Living in fear, shame, or isolation
- Clinging to control, superiority, or exclusion
- Being “stuck” in woundedness or bitterness

Matthew even shifts Isaiah's language from *walking* in darkness to *sitting* in darkness—suggesting deep helplessness or stagnation.

Spiritual light reveals reality as God sees it—not just as we feel it:

- It is rooted in Christ, not ideology
 - It brings freedom, not fear
 - It draws us into compassion and community
 - It humbles and heals
 - It makes space for all, especially the marginalized
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How Do We Know If It's *True* Light?

Ask:

- Does this draw me closer to **Christ's love and humility**?
- Does it help me love my neighbor—especially the one I struggle with?
- Does it challenge my ego, or just confirm my bias?
- Is it bearing fruit in me: **peace, patience, compassion, justice**? (*Galatians 5:22–23*)
- Would Jesus recognize this as part of his mission to **heal, liberate, and unite**?

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

(*John 8:12*)

A Word of Caution: When “Clarity” is Actually Corruption

It’s possible to find a sense of direction or community in a group that’s spiritually toxic. People may say:

- “I finally understand what’s going on—*they’re* the problem!”
- “I used to be confused, now I know who I am—*we* are the righteous ones.”
- “I found a cause. We’re going to take back what was stolen.”

This feels like light, but it’s **a lie in disguise**. It isolates, divides, and breeds contempt.

True spiritual light **liberates without scapegoating**. It **heals without exclusion**.

“If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (*Matthew 6:23*)

Why Matthew Pairs This With the Temptation Story

Jesus has just come through the wilderness where he resisted Satan’s distorted truth.

And then we hear:

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light...” (*Matthew 4:16*)

This isn’t a coincidence.

Jesus *emerges from false light* and begins shining the **true light**—healing, restoring, gathering crowds, proclaiming the Kingdom.

This moment is not just about geography (Galilee) or timing—it’s about **clarity**. The Light has arrived, and it’s nothing like the darkness pretending to be truth.

Reflection Questions

Choose a question to comment on.

1. Have you ever been tempted to call something “light” that later proved to be darkness?
 2. Where do you see false “light” in today’s world—ideas or groups that seem righteous but bear bad fruit?
 3. What does true spiritual light look like in your life right now?
 4. Is there a place in your life where you feel “stuck”—like the people who “sat” in darkness in Matthew?
 5. How can you be a bearer of **true light** to someone else this week?
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Topics for Meditation this week:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

(*John 1:5*)

“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.”

(*Ephesians 5:8*)