

## ~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:

### The Rejection of Gospel-light, the Condemnation of Men

A sermon by Samuel Davies, delivered at Princeton College

"And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light—for fear that his deeds will be exposed!" John 3:19-20

What a strange and alarming declaration is this! Light has come into the world! The Sun of Righteousness has risen upon this region of darkness; therefore it is enlightened; therefore it is bright daylight with all its rational inhabitants: therefore they will no longer grope and stumble in darkness—but all find their way into the world of eternal light and glory.

These would be natural inferences from this event that we would be apt to expect from the entrance of light into the world. But hear and tremble, you inhabitants of the enlightened parts of the earth! hear and tremble, you inhabitants of Princeton! The benevolent Jesus, the Friend of human nature, the Savior of men, whose lips never dropped an over-severe word, or gave a false alarm: Jesus himself proclaims, "And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

"This is the condemnation!" That is, this is the great occasion of more aggravated condemnation at the final judgment, and of more severe and dreadful punishments in the eternal world; or, this is the cause of men's condemning themselves even now at the bar of their own consciences.

That light has come into the world—Jesus, the Sun of the moral world, has risen, and darts his beams around him in the gospel. And this furnishes guilty minds with materials for self-condemnation; and their obstinate resistance of the light enhances their guilt, and will render their condemnation the more aggravated; and the reason is, that "men love darkness rather than light!" They choose ignorance rather than knowledge! The Sun of righteousness is not agreeable to them—but shines as a baleful, ill-boding luminary. If they did but love the light, its entrance into the world would be their salvation; but now it is their condemnation!

Truly, light is sweet—and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to see the light of the sun. And no light is so sweet as this divine light from heaven—no sun so bright and reviving as the Sun of righteousness!

But why do they hate the light? Alas! there is no reason for it—but this wretched one, "men loved darkness rather than light—because their deeds were evil!" And evil deeds always excite uneasiness in the light, and afford the conscience matter of self-accusation, therefore they wrap them selves up in darkness, and avoid the painful discoveries of the light!

The text directs us to the following inquiries:

What is that light which has come into the world?

What is that darkness which is opposed to it?

What are the evidences of men's loving darkness rather than light?

What is the reason for it?

In what respect is the light's coming into the world, and men's loving darkness rather than light—their condemnation?

1. What is that LIGHT, which has come into the world?

The answer to this and the other questions, I shall endeavor to accommodate to our own times and circumstances, that we may the more readily apply it to ourselves.

The light of reason entered our world as soon as the soul of man was created; and, though it is greatly obscured by the grand apostasy—yet some sparks of it still remain.

To supply its defects, the light of Revelation soon darted its beams through the clouds of ignorance which obscured the human mind—on its flying off to so great a distance from the Father of lights. This heavenly day began feebly to dawn upon the first pair of sinners, in that early promise concerning the seed of the woman: and it grew brighter and brighter in the successive revelations made to the patriarchs, to Moses, and the prophets; until at length the Messiah appeared, as an illustrious sun—after a gradual, tedious twilight of the opening dawn.

The light of human literature has also come into the world, and shines with unusual splendors upon our age and nation; and lo! it illuminates this little village, and extends its beams through the land.

But it is not light in any of these senses, that our Lord principally intends—but himself and his blessed gospel; a more clear and divine light than any of the former.

He often represents himself under the strong and insightful metaphor of LIGHT. "I am the light of the world," says he: "he who follows me shall not walk in darkness." John 8:12. "I am come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me, should not abide in darkness." John 12:46. Light is a strong and beautiful metaphor for knowledge, prosperity, comfort, and happiness; and these are the rays which the blessed Jesus diffuses around him. But wherever he does not shine, all is sullen and dismal darkness. HELL is the BLACKNESS of darkness forever, because he does not extend to it the light of his countenance. That country where he does not shine—is the land of darkness and the shadow of death! And that heart which is not illuminated with the light of the knowledge of his glory—is the gloomy dungeon of infernal spirits. But wherever he shines, there is intellectual day, the bright meridian of glory and blessedness.

His gospel also is frequently represented as a great light; and no metaphor was ever used with more emphasis and propriety. His gospel is the medium through which we discover the glory of the Deity, the beauties of holiness, the evil of sin, and the reality and infinite importance of eternal, invisible things! His gospel is the light that reveals the secrets of the heart, and reveals ourselves to ourselves. It is this which gives us a just and full view of our duty to God and man, which is but imperfectly or falsely represented in every other system of religion and morality in the world. It is this which reveals and ascertains the method in which rebels may be reconciled to their offended Sovereign, and exhibits a Savior in full view to perishing sinners.

Hail! sacred heaven-born light! Welcome to our eyes, O brightest and fairest effulgence of the divine perfections! May this dayspring from on high, visit all the regions of this benighted world, and overwhelm it as with a deluge of celestial light! Blessed be God, its vital rays have reached to us in these ends of the earth; and if any of us remain ignorant of the important discoveries it makes—it is because we love darkness rather than light! Which leads me to inquire,

## II. What is that DARKNESS, which is opposed to this heavenly light?

Darkness is a word of gloomy import; and there is hardly anything dismal or destructive—but what is expressed by it in Scripture. But the precise sense of the word in my text is, a state of ignorance, and the absence of the means of conviction. Men love darkness rather than light; that is, they choose to be ignorant, rather than well-informed. They choose to be ignorant, particularly of such things as will give them uneasiness to know—such as their sin, and the danger to which it exposes them. They are willfully ignorant; and hence they hate the means that would alarm them with the mortifying discovery. They would rather be flattered than told the honest truth, and know their own character and condition; and hence they shut their eyes against the light of the gospel—which would flash the painful conviction upon them. Though the light of the gospel shines round you—yet are not some of you involved in this darkness? This you may know by the next inquiry.

## III. What are the EVIDENCES of men's loving darkness, rather than light?

The general evidence, which comprehends all the rest, is their avoiding the means of conviction, and using all the artifices in their power to render them ineffectual.

Those of you who love darkness rather than light, are so much upon your guard against the discovery, as not to perceive your own character. Though you may have a turn for speculation, and perhaps delight in every other branch of knowledge—yet the knowledge of yourselves, the knowledge of your duties to God, the discovery of your sin and danger, of your miserable condition as under the condemnation of the divine law—this kind of

self-knowledge you carefully shun! And, when it irresistibly flashes upon you—then you endeavor to shut up all the avenues of your mind, through which it might break upon you, and you avoid those means of conviction from which it proceeds!

You set yourselves upon an attempt which is very preposterous and absurd in a rational being, and that is, Not to think. When the ill-boding surmise rises within, "All is not well with my soul! I am not prepared for the eternal world! If I should die in this condition, I am undone forever!" When conscience thus whispers your doom, it may make you sad and pensive for a minute or two—but you soon forget it; you designedly labor to cast it out of your thoughts, and to recover your former stupid serenity. The light of conviction is a painful blaze to a guilty eye! So you wrap yourselves up in darkness, lest it should break in upon you!

When your thoughts are likely to fix upon this painful subject, do you not labor to divert them into another channel? You immerse yourselves in business, you mingle in company, you indulge and nourish a thoughtless levity of mind, you break out of retirement into the wide world—that theater of folly, trifling, and dissipation! And all this to scatter the gloom of conviction which hangs over your ill-boding minds, and silence the clamors of an exasperated conscience! You laugh, or talk, or work, or study away these fits of seriousness! You endeavor to prejudice yourselves against them, by giving them ill names such as fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, and I know not what! Whereas they are indeed—the honest struggles of an oppressed conscience to obtain a fair hearing, and give you faithful warning of approaching ruin! They are the benevolent efforts of the Spirit of grace to save a lost soul. And O! it would be happy for you if you had yielded to them, and nourished the serious hour!

For the same reason, also, you love a soft representation of Christianity, as an easy, indolent, inactive thing; requiring no vigorous exertion, and attended with no difficult conflict! You love an easy-going gospel which encourages your hopes of heaven—even while you remain in a course of sloth, carelessness, and sinful indulgence! Your favorite sermons and favorite books—are those which flatter you with smooth things, putting the most favorable construction upon your wickedness, and representing the way to heaven as smooth and easy!

Or if you have an unaccountable fondness for faithful, and therefore, alarming preaching, as it must be owned that some self-flatterers have, it is not with a view to apply it to yourselves—but to others. If you love the light, it is not that you may see yourselves—but other objects. And whenever it forces upon you a glance of yourselves, you immediately turn from it and hate it!

Hatred of the light, perhaps, is the reason why so many among us are so impatient of public worship; so fond of their own homes on the sacred hours consecrated to divine service: and are so reluctant, so late, or so inconstant in their attendance. It is darkness perhaps, at home; but the house of God is filled with bright light, which they hate—because their deeds are evil!

This also is one reason why they hate the conversation of zealous Christians, who are not ashamed to talk of what lies nearest their hearts—their Savior, and His gospel; and to express an abhorrence of what they so sincerely hate—the sins of mankind, and every appearance of evil. I say, this is one reason why their conversation is such a heavy and painful burden to those who love darkness. Such godly men reflect the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and the beauties of holiness all around them! They carry light with them wherever they go—and this light strikes painful conviction to the guilty. The strictness, the warm devotion and spirituality of their lives, pass a sentence of condemnation upon the ungodly; a sentence which they cannot but feel, and which therefore renders them very uneasy. Hence it is that such lively and holy believers are not at all popular in the world.

The favorites of the world are your pliable, obliging, accommodating professors, who never carry true religion with them into polite company—but conform themselves to the taste of those they converse with. These give no man's conscience uneasiness, they reflect no heavenly light—but thicken the darkness of every company in which they appear; therefore they are quite acceptable to every lover of darkness.

Another expedient that has often been used, and which some of you perhaps have attempted, to avoid the light, is: to endeavor to work up yourselves to a disbelief of the Christian gospel. If you could banish that heavenly light out of the world, or substitute darkness in its place—then you might perpetrate the works of darkness with more confidence and abandonment! Therefore you eagerly listen to the laughs, the jeers, the raileries and sophisms of loose wits against the gospel; and you are afraid to give a fair hearing to the many satisfactory evidences in its favor. Thus you nourish that hideous monster, UNBELIEF; which is your own offspring, not Satan's, though he is the father of lies; for the demons believe—and tremble! James 2:19.

These artifices and the like, are the effects, and consequently the evidences and indications of men's loving darkness rather than light. And instead of a larger illustration, I shall conclude this head with a plain honest appeal to my hearers.

As in the presence of the heart-searching God, I solemnly appeal to your consciences, whether you do not deal partially with yourselves, and refuse pursuing those hints of your dangerous condition—because you love darkness, and therefore do not want to make a full discovery of your dreadful condition! Do not your hearts smite you, because you have suppressed evidence, when it was against you, and shut your eyes against plain conviction? When the looking-glass of the divine law has been held up before you, and shown you your own hideous image—have you not gone away, and soon forgot what kind of men you are? Do you not know in your consciences, that the hopes you entertain of future happiness—are not the result of severe repeated trial—but on the other hand, owe their strength and even their being to a superficial examination, or none at all—to blind self-flattery and excessive self-love, which tempt you to believe things—just as you would have them? Is it censoriousness, or is it evidence and faithfulness, that constrains me to cry out, "O! how rare are well-founded, well-attested hopes of heaven among us! Hopes supported by that only sufficient proof—a conspicuous holiness of heart and life!"

I proceed to inquire,

IV. What is the REASON of this absurd preference, that men love darkness rather than light?

The melancholy reason of this is easily discovered, and has been partly anticipated; and it is this: that men love ease and peace of mind—rather than fear and anxiety. They are really obnoxious sinners, under the dreadful displeasure of almighty God, and on the slippery brink of everlasting destruction! Now to have a full conviction of this—would alarm their fears, embitter their pleasures, dampen their eager pursuits after the world, and cast their minds into a ferment of anxiety and terror! But to be blind to all these miserable prospects, to be elated with hopeful expectations of the contrary, to have all serene and calm within, to be charmed with all the fine delusions of a flattering imagination; to be ignorant of danger, and pleased with themselves; this is a state they naturally delight in! In this state they will lull themselves asleep at all hazards, regardless of the consequence!

And as darkness is the most proper attendant of sleep, therefore they choose it. But the light of the gospel let into the conscience would give them quite another view of things! It would:

overturn all their towering hopes;

set the terrors of the Lord in array against them;

open such shocking prospects in the ways of sin—

that they could no longer dare to walk in them; would constrain them to indulge the sorrows of a broken heart, and to long, and pant, and look, and cry for a Savior! This would be a very painful exercise to them; and therefore they hate and shun the light, which would force the unwelcome convictions upon them!

"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." John 3:21. Such a one is willing to be searched. The trial is in his favor, and will turn out to his honor.

This is the reason which Christ himself assigns for some men's loving darkness, rather than light. "But everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light—for fear that his deeds will be exposed." John 3:20. It is the fear of this 'exposure' which makes him afraid of the light; for he cannot but be conscious that his evil deeds deserve divine punishment: and to be thus 'exposed' will yield him pain.

"But since they have such favorable thoughts of themselves, and entertain such high hopes—why are they afraid of the light? Must they not rather presume its discoveries will be in their favor? And if so, why do they hate it?"

I answer, that notwithstanding all their high sentiments of themselves, they have often a secret suspicion that they are not well grounded, and that the light would make some dreadful discoveries concerning themselves! And hence they will not venture to trust themselves in the light, lest their secret suspicion should be confirmed,

and rise into a full conviction.

It is really so evident that they are guilty, unholy creatures, unfit for heaven, and their consciences sometimes give them such hints of this alarming secret—that they cannot keep themselves altogether ignorant of it. They therefore try to evade the trial, lest the sentence should go against them. I appeal to your own hearts, my friends, whether this is not the true reason why you are so unwilling to examine yourselves, and submit to the severe scrutiny of the light of Scripture? What is the true reason why you are averse to the light of self-knowledge, and the means that would obtrude it upon you? Is it not because you cannot but pre-judge the matter even against yourselves—in spite of all the arts of self-flattery? And if there are such strong evidence against you—that even yourselves cannot but dread a trial at the tribunal of your consciences—then is it not evident, that your chosen darkness is your only guard against conviction, and that your case is really bad? And if so, how sorry a relief is it to avoid the discovery! Since all your preposterous care to avoid it—will but aggravate your condemnation! Which naturally introduces the last inquiry:

V. In what respects, that the light's coming into the world, and men's loving darkness rather than light—is their own condemnation.

Here I have only to illustrate two particulars already hinted at; that this furnishes them with matter for self-condemnation now—and will be the occasion of their more aggravated condemnation in the eternal world.

1. This furnishes them with matter of self-condemnation in the PRESENT state. It is hard, perhaps impossible, for sinners under the meridian light of the gospel—to avoid all conviction of their guilt and danger. That light is very penetrating, and will dart its rays through the thickest glooms of ignorance! "For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword—it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart!" Hebrews 4:12.

Such of you, my friends, as are resolved to shun the mortification of self-knowledge, live in a situation very unfavorable to your design. You have had "burning and shining lights" among you, who have shone as the sun; (Davies may here be alluding to Jonathan Edwards, president of Princeton College—who had recently died). But, when they were translated to a higher sphere, the gospel has not left you—but still shines around you; and you will find it very difficult, I hope, impossible, to wrap up yourselves in Egyptian darkness in such a Goshen—such a land of light. In Japan, India, or some savage region of darkness—you might have lived in contented ignorance, and avoided those unacceptable blazes of light which will now break in upon you, in spite of all your vigilance; for under the faithful and solemn preaching of the gospel, your consciences will often be disturbed, and you will find yourselves unable to go on in sin boldly and fearlessly. And though in the thoughtless gaiety of health, and the hurry and din of business—you may drown the clamors of conscience—yet in a retired hour, upon a sick bed, and in the near views of death and eternity—then conscience will speak, and constrain you to hear! And thus you will live as unhappy, self-condemned creatures in this world, until you are condemned by the righteous sentence of God in the world to come! Therefore consider,

2. Your loving darkness rather than light, will occasion your more aggravated condemnation in the ETERNAL world. It was in your power to receive warning, and discover your danger in time! Nay, it cost you some pains to avoid the discovery, and despise the warning. And what a fruitful source of self-tormenting reflections will this be! How will you then fret, and vex, and accuse, and condemn yourselves—for acting so foolish a part! How will you then exhaust and spend yourselves in eager, fruitless wishes—that you had admitted conviction, while the danger was avoidable! But, O! it will then be too late!

HELL is a region of darkness too—but not of that soothing, peaceful darkness of ignorance, which you now prefer to the light of the gospel—but a dreadful, tremendous, tormenting darkness, which will forever hide every bright and pleasing prospect from your eyes! And yet, this darkness of hell will be the proper medium for revealing sights of woe and terror! It will be a thick darkness, occasioned by the everlasting eclipse of the Sun of righteousness and the light of God's countenance, who will never dart one ray of comfort or of hope through the sullen gloom!

In this blackness of this hellish darkness—you, who now love darkness rather than light—must dwell forever! And O! how will your consciences haunt and terrify you—in that black, cheerless, stormy, eternal night!

Your guilt will also appear great in the sight of God, as well as to your own consciences, and therefore he will inflict the greater punishment upon you. You have despised the richest blessings that even infinite goodness

could bestow upon sinful men; I mean, his gospel and his Son! You have made light of His gospel in the most open and audacious manner. He knows you were even afraid to discover your duty towards him; he knows you would not regard your own consciences when they were his advocates, and that you were unwilling to admit so much conviction as would render you sorry for your offences against him. Nay, he knows that your being convinced, that this or that was an offence against Him—was no restraint to you from the commission of it!

In short, he knows that you spent your lives either in sinning against knowledge—or in avoiding that knowledge which would have prevented your sinning. And while he views you in this light—what obstinate, willful, daring offenders must you appear in his eyes! And what aggravated punishment must he judge to be your just recompense! He also knows that you blinded yourself, and struggled against your own salvation, and hated that light which would have shown you the way to everlasting life! And must he not think you worthy of that dreadful eternal destruction which you have voluntarily chosen—and refuse you admittance to that eternal happiness which you willfully refused?

This is the representation which the holy Scriptures uniformly give us, of such as love darkness rather than light. "If I had not come and spoken to them," says the blessed Jesus, "they would not have sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." It shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment—for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, though most notorious for all manner of wickedness and debauchery—than for the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, in which Christ's mighty works were done, and the light of his gospel shone so brightly! Matthew 11:21, 24.

And this is perfectly agreeable to the eternal rules of justice and righteousness: that much should be required—where much has been given; and that the degree of guilt should be estimated by the degrees of obligation, and advantages for obedience.

And now, my dear hearers, upon a review of this subject, you see your own circumstances: the light has come among you—it shines all around you! And, I doubt not but at times it finds some openings through which it forces its way even into your unwilling minds. You have light to distinguish between truth—and error; between sin—and duty to God; between the way to heaven—and the way to hell. You are warned, admonished and instructed. You have the strongest inducements to a life of holiness—and the strongest dissuasives from a course of sin. I leave you therefore to determine what your guilt and punishment must be—if you choose darkness rather than light; if you refuse light so clear, so reviving, so beneficial, so divine!

This alarming subject is very pertinent to us all, and we should all apply it to ourselves. But it is so peculiarly adapted to the residents of this college, that I must direct my address particularly to you, my dear pupils, who have had the light shine so brightly around you.

There is not one in a thousand people—who enjoy your spiritual advantages. Light, human and divine, natural and supernatural, ancient and modern; that is, knowledge of every kind—shines upon you, and you are every day basking under its rays. You have nothing to do but to polish your minds, and, as it were, render them luminous.

But let me put you in mind, that unless you admit the light of the glorious gospel of Christ to shine in your hearts—you will still be the children of darkness, and confined in the blackness of darkness forever! This is intolerably shocking, even in supposition: Suppose any of you should be surrounded with more light than others—for no other purpose but that you may have a stronger conflict with conviction, and that your consciences may with greater force raise tumults and insurrections within you! Suppose your sins should be the sins of men of learning and knowledge, the most daring and gigantic sins on this side of hell! Suppose you should turn out to be sinners of great abilities, fine geniuses, like the fallen angels, those vast intellects; wise but wicked; wise to do evil; but without knowledge to do good! Suppose it should be your highest character, that you can dispute well, that you know a few dead languages, that you have passed through a course of philosophy; but as to that knowledge which sanctifies all the rest, and renders them useful to yourselves or others; that knowledge which alone can make you wise to salvation, and guide you to avoid the paths of eternal destruction—you shun it, you hate it, and choose to remain contentedly ignorant in this important respect!

Suppose your parents, who have financed your education; your friends, who have entertained such high and pleasing expectations concerning you; church and state, which look to you for help, and depend upon you to fill stations of importance in the world; and your godly instructors, who observe your growing improvements with proportional pleasure; suppose, that after all this sincere labor, and all these pleasing prospects, they should see you at last doomed to everlasting darkness, for your voluntary abuse of the light you now enjoy!

Suppose these things, and the consequences of these suppositions are so dreadful—that I am not hardy enough to mention them. And O! shall they ever become matters of fact!

Therefore, my dear pupils—admit the light, love it, and pursue it, though at first it should make such discoveries as may be painful to you; for the pain will prove medicinal. By discovering your danger in time—you may be able to escape it. But never expect to remove the painful discovery—by the silly expedient of shutting your eyes to the light! Be impartial inquirers after truth as to yourselves—and no longer attempt to put a cheat upon yourselves! Alas! how childish and foolish—as well as wicked and ruinous—would such an imposture be!

The gospel, in this particular, only requires you to be honest men; and surely this is a most moderate and reasonable demand. Therefore, be children of the light and of the day, and walk as such—and then you will be a blessing to the world and to yourselves.

Finally, let us all remember the terror of this friendly warning: "And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light—for fear that his deeds will be exposed!" John 3:19-20