

The Armour of Light (Romans 13:12)

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I would like to speak about a great robbery that is taking place among us. It is of more consequence than any theft in history. The thief is Satan, and his objective is to rob us of light. Lucifer does not want to steal light for himself; he wants to steal light because it is the presence of light by which he can be defeated. Since Satan abhors light and avoids its presence, and since he cannot conventionally steal light against one's will, his efforts and temptations are designed to entice his targets to voluntarily yield it up that he might more freely and effectively carry forth his destructive plans. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches:

The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.

Light and truth forsake that evil one. . . .

And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men. [D&C 93:36–37, 39]

Satan steals light from us through our own disobedience.

Why is light so valuable and its loss so devastating? The revelations of the Restoration contribute much to our understanding about light. The analogies I will use this morning are based upon scriptures that refer to light as spirit, as truth, or as the power of God. Having light is evidence that Jesus Christ is part of our life. His light—His spirit, His truth, His power—inspires, motivates, comforts, capacitates, and protects. An abundance of light in a person's life is manifested by virtues such as faith, hope, charity, patience, kindness, and humility. Outward signs of light are easy to recognize: respect, dependability, dedication to duty, modesty, obedience, and reverence for the things of God. When light is diminished in our lives, motivation toward spiritual things also diminishes to one degree or another. We are less exact in our commandment keeping and less dedicated to activities such as home teaching, Church attendance, temple attendance, scripture reading, and prayer—the very things that intensify light in our lives. With insufficient light we are more susceptible to temptation, and like a plant without the nourishment of the light of the sun, without the nourishment of the light of the Son of God, we can also weaken and shrivel and eventually die spiritually.

We call people who have an abundance of this light "spiritual." Jesus Christ is the light and life of the world. Spiritual people—or those who strive to always have His spirit to be with them—reflect the light of Jesus Christ in their lives and in their countenances. I love senior citizens in the Church—those who have been sanctified through continued righteousness over time. Their countenances reflect

a life well lived. Having learned to walk in the light, they have become a reflection of that light. This is clearly evident in the radiance of those who give significant time to temple service.

Light is like a protective shield that can withstand the fiery darts of the adversary. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans:

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness. . . .

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. [Romans 13:12–14]

To put on the armor of light is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the light and life of the world. This light—His light—forsakes the evil one.

Let me give you two examples. First, as I read this familiar story, listen closely and try to discern at what particular point darkness was defeated.

After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him! [JS—H 1:15–17; emphasis in original]

In the Sacred Grove, darkness left young Joseph Smith when the light first appeared.

The second example involves an experience I had in graduate school. I asked one of my classmates to take the missionary discussions. He did not join the Church at that time, and I moved back to Arizona. When I came back for another summer school session, I learned that although he had not been baptized, he had been going to church for the entire year that I had been away.

One evening I got a call from him requesting that we meet in the bleachers of the Smith Fieldhouse. He was puzzled over something that had just occurred. A few years before my friend had seen a movie that was a graphic R-rated movie on the subject of demonic possession. Now a friend had asked him to see the sequel to the movie, and this suggestion to see the second movie had brought back vivid memories of the content of the first movie that, at the time, my friend had thought little about. But now, a few years later, and after a year's worth of church attendance, things were somehow different. He went to bed but could not stop thinking about the movie. He became extremely nervous and began sweating profusely. Finally, at about two o'clock in the morning, he reached over to his nightstand and picked up his copy of the Book of Mormon and started to read. He said that as he read, the nervousness went away and he calmed down and was able to fall asleep.

His purpose for our meeting was to ask me if I could explain what had happened to him. You can imagine I was most eager to do so. I testified to him that the Book of Mormon was true and that the light contained within its pages chased away the darkness that he was experiencing as he reflected on the evil contained within the movie. Again, light forsakes the evil one!

Light can increase or decrease according to what we desire, what we think, and what we do. Nephi taught:

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. [2 Nephi 28:30]

The principle that we receive more and more from God according to our continued obedience is true of light. The Lord declared:

That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. [D&C 50:24]

This same truth can also work in reverse. People lose light line upon line or sin upon sin—here a little and there a little. Although each ray of lost light can be almost imperceptible to a person at the time, the aggregate or cumulative loss that has taken place over time puts one in grave danger. The spiritual immune system becomes depleted, and when the going gets tough, the once tough cannot get going because there is little to reach down and draw upon for strength and power.

The story is told of an Eskimo who was losing his meat to a crafty wolf. One day the Eskimo took his razor-sharp knife and placed it blade up in the snow. He then put a big piece of meat on top of the blade so that all the wolf would see was the meat. The wolf came and began enjoying the easy meal. The meat was so delicious that he didn't notice that as he was licking and biting, he was cutting his own tongue on the knife. The wolf was literally drinking his own blood, which continued until he became so weak that he froze to death.

As in the story of the Eskimo, Satan tempts us with alluring distractions and circumstances that may appear on the surface to be harmless. But as we partake, the light slowly dissipates until we become weak and in serious spiritual trouble. President Kimball taught that transgression “begins tiny and grows to monumental proportions. It grows drop by drop, inch by inch” (*TSWK*, 152).

When we lose light, Satan has effectively neutralized us. He has taken us out of the battle—or we have allowed ourselves to be taken out of the battle. The armies of the Lord cannot be defeated, but they can defeat themselves. For example, in the Old Testament there is a story about a man named Achan whose disobedience brought defeat to Israel’s army (see Joshua 7; 22:20). In the victorious battle against Jericho he had taken an object from the enemy that God identified as accursed. The next battle against the city of Ai was supposed to be easy, yet Israel met with a humiliating defeat. In response to Joshua’s plea to know why they had been defeated, the Lord revealed the disobedience of this Israelite soldier in taking from the spoils of Jericho a forbidden or accursed object. This disobedience robbed the Israelites of the power needed to stand against its enemies. This story has universal application, for just as Israel lost power and protection, we also lose power and protection when we entertain forbidden thoughts, harbor evil desires, or engage in activities prohibited by God.

Maintaining light is like staying spiritually in shape so that when the test comes we can meet it. A person who slowly drifts over time into poor physical shape does not fully appreciate that fact until a test arises that requires great physical exertion. The test or trial clearly exposes the lack of capacity. A colleague of mine observed that it is the storm that reveals the importance of having your house built on rock and not on sand.

Imagine two elders who are home teaching companions. They return home from their separate Friday night activities to each find a message that a sister they home teach had been in an accident and desperately needed them to come to the hospital to administer a blessing. One elder had just returned home from a movie where violence, profanity, immorality, and partial nudity had been part of the film. The other elder had returned from a barbecue with friends. Which elder do you suppose would make an excuse or perhaps delay the hospital visit long enough to petition God for forgiveness to have the proper spirit to give a blessing? Which elder would feel comfortable meeting the challenge of listening to the still small voice of the Lord to pronounce an inspired blessing?

Dabbling in darkness robs one of light and consequently the spiritual confidence to stand in the Lord’s place to bless as He would bless. The true witness that light has been lost comes when one shrinks back, lacking confidence to perform one’s duty. Through disobedience Christian soldiers can effectively nullify the power of their own priesthood. What if both elders had attended that movie?

In our homes we have power outlets of either 240 or 120 volts. Dryers and ovens operate on 240 power, whereas all other devices require 120 power. A dryer or an oven would not work effectively on 120 power. Sometimes electrical problems cause what is known as a brownout. Electrical power is still present, but it is not sufficient to handle the load requirement. By way of analogy, compare 240 power to the power required to stand up to the challenges and temptations of latter-day life. Then compare 120 power to power that enables us to live, move, attend school, and function but that is insufficient when we are

faced with the kinds of temptations that surround us. When we fail to maintain light in our lives, we fail to maintain necessary power levels. We slip into a “spiritual brownout,” so to speak, placing ourselves in a dangerous weakened position with less strength to resist temptation.

Concerning Satan’s tactics, Nephi wrote:

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. [2 Nephi 28:21]

The “all-is-well-in-Zion” way of discipleship is like this spiritual brownout. It says: I can be laid back in the Church. I can skip my personal prayers, indulge in borderline entertainment, skip some meetings, and sidestep full-hearted service. In essence, I can run at 120 power, and all is well. This is simply not true. As Nephi said, “Thus the devil cheateth their souls.” We have been blindsided by our own inattention to duty and devotion to God. Over time we have lost a significant measure of what we all so desperately need—the light, the spirit, the power of God. We have been carefully weakened so that when a 240 test comes, we fail because we only possess 120 power.

As a campus bishop I saw this consequent result over and over in regard to serious sin. Invariably those in trouble had suffered losses before the bigger loss had occurred, and it was those preparatory losses that set up the bigger fall.

There is no little loss of light that is insignificant, and there is no little loss of light without the potential of becoming a major breach to the brightness of our armor. As Latter-day Saints we are blessed with the glorious light of the restored gospel. We have no excuse, as the scriptures state, to walk “in darkness at noon-day” (D&C 95:6). In the Doctrine and Covenants we are warned: “He who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3).

One temptation that seems to be a challenge for all of us is the temptation to play both sides of the fence. We select some things in the Church that we like and some things of the world that we like, and we try to settle in and get comfortable with the mix. Some want to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and also party in the great and spacious building. The Apostle James said, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). Jesus taught, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Just as a farmer who looks back cannot plough a straight furrow, neither can a disciple walk on the straight and narrow path for an extended period with split loyalties. Lot’s wife was punished for her disobedience in looking back at Sodom and Gomorrah. Although her feet were pointed away from the city, perhaps her real problem was that her heart remained within it. Our feet as well as our hearts need to be on the gospel path.

I would like to issue a challenge: Sometime today take a piece of paper and divide it into two halves. On the right side list things that could intensify light in your life: temple attendance, attendance at all Sunday meetings, scriptures, prayers, repentance, service, and so forth. On the left side list things that you think, desire, do, say, view, or even places you go, that diminish light from your life. Then ask yourself in all honesty, “How can I improve in those things that

intensify light, and what can I simply let go of that takes light away?" As in the story of Achan: "What accursed things do I do, say, think, or hold onto that drain my power?" This list can be compared to a dimmer switch that controls the intensity of light within our homes. Turn the dial to the right and light increases. Turn the dial to the left and the light dims. The decision as to which way we turn the dial is up to us.

Remember that this is not a balance sheet where the seven good things on the right side cancel out the five bad things on the left side, leaving us with two positives. If that was possible, I might reason, I can continue with the five things that take away light because I can easily counterbalance them and still come out on top. Somehow, feeling safe because of a balancing of the two is spiritually dangerous. The bad things we choose weaken the system so that sometimes we are unable to fully compensate by choosing good. In fact, the consequence of choosing bad, over time, is that the good doesn't seem so good anymore. As more and more bad things are chosen, they become more and more desirable and seem less and less wrong. Another consequence of choices that rob us of light is that we don't discern the good as clearly, and that leads to the possibility of delving deeper and deeper into the bad. When you are in the darkness, your eyes adjust, and it soon doesn't look dark anymore. So, too, can we adjust to dark deeds and actually acquire a taste for the bad.

We cannot willingly keep taking the poison without consequence. God will not be mocked, for as we sow, so shall we reap (see Galatians 6:7). As we sow light, we receive light. As we sow disobedience, we reap darkness. Jesus taught:

The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! [3 Nephi 13:22–23]

As you try this challenge you might find that you don't really have many things on the left side that cause a loss of light, but you will find that you could add more things on the right side that will bring more of God's light into your life. Sometimes the critical issue is not the commission of light-robbing activities but serious omissions of light-bringing deeds.

In connection with this challenge consider striving to make your living areas places where God's light can shine unobstructed. I currently serve in a branch presidency at the Missionary Training Center. The Missionary Training Center is a place where the Lord's light shines brightly—it is hard to go there and not feel the presence of the Holy Ghost. There are no questionable pictures on the walls, there is no music with suggestive lyrics, and there is no entertainment that compromises standards. The missionaries are trying hard to avoid the coarse, the unclean, and the vulgar. Christ and service to Christ is at the center. In this environment learning soars, and missionaries are often heard to say, "I have never felt the Spirit so often, or so intensely."

Although we are not full-time missionaries with that central focus, we can join together with our roommates or spouses and agree to cultivate an environment of light in our dormitories or apartments. As are the missionaries, we also can be Christ-centered, and we also can eliminate those things of the world that dim

God's light. By doing so we can enjoy the blessings associated with increased light.

Living in an environment of light will have many advantages for you at this time in your life. You are searching for important answers to critical questions. It is always easier to find what we are looking for when the light is on. Doctrinally it is as simple as this: The closer we are to the light, the more we can see. The farther we step away from the light, the less we can see. And we need to be able to see clearly.

In a devotional assembly President Bateman told students:

You stand at a critical juncture in life. You have just crossed the threshold into adulthood. Your dreams and choices will determine not only your future but the destiny of untold generations to come! [Merrill J. Bateman, "Light, Visions, and Dreams," *BYU 2000–2001 Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 2001), 101]

In connection with this thought, he asked this question: "Are you living worthy to experience the light that the Lord wishes to bestow upon you?" ("Light, Visions," 101).

I would like to close with an observation by Elder Glenn L. Pace of the First Quorum of the Seventy:

Many of us take the blessings of the gospel for granted. It is as if we are passengers on the train of the Church, which has been moving forward gradually and methodically. Sometimes we have looked out the window and thought, "That looks kind of fun out there. This train is so restrictive." So we have jumped off and gone and played in the woods for a while. Sooner or later, we find it isn't as much fun as Lucifer makes it appear or we get critically injured, so we work our way back to the tracks and see the train ahead. With a determined sprint we catch up to it, breathlessly wipe the perspiration from our forehead, and thank the Lord for repentance.

While on the train, we can see the world and some of our own members outside laughing and having a great time. They taunt us and coax us to get off. Some throw logs and rocks on the tracks to try and derail it. Other members run alongside the tracks, and although they may never go play in the woods, they just can't seem to get on the train. Others try to run ahead and too often take the wrong turn.

I would propose that the luxury of getting on and off the train as we please is fading. The speed of the train is increasing. The woods are getting much too dangerous, and the fog and darkness are moving in. . . .

. . . With all the prophecies we have seen fulfilled, what great event are we awaiting prior to saying, "Count me in"? What more do we need to see or experience before we get on the train and stay on it until we reach our destination? It is time for a spiritual revival. It is time to dig down deep within ourselves and rekindle our own light. [Glenn L. Pace, "Spiritual Revival," *Ensign*, November 1992, 11–12]

May each of us dig down deep and do what is needed to intensify light in our life. May we also guard against its theft. Jesus said:

But know this, if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to have been broken up, but would have been ready. [JS—M 1:47]

We are the good men and women of the house, and Lucifer is the thief who is diligently, patiently, and carefully seeking to break up our house—or to destroy our souls. May we always watch and be ready.

I testify that the things I have spoken of today are true. I pray that we might maintain the brightness of our armor, the armor of light, by consistently coming unto the light—even Jesus Christ—who is the light. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.