

ΘΩΣ AS USED IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

by

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Students of the Word of God have been puzzled as to the exact meaning of the usage of φῶς, "light," in the Johannine writings. Many and varied interpretations have been cited as to its meaning and significance. The purpose and intent of this thesis was to study, both inductively and deductively, the biblical material in order to ascertain the usage of φῶς in the Johannine writings.

Inductively, this study of φῶς was evaluated by surveying its usage in Scripture as a whole. In the Old Testament נָאֵר (φῶς in the LXX) appears both as a noun "to shine" or "to enlighten." As a noun, נָאֵר is understood both in a natural sense, the light of the heavenly illuminaries, etc., and also metaphorically as denoting joy and happiness, the nature of God, etc. In the New Testament φῶς also appears characteristically either in the natural or the metaphorical realm as was evident in the Old Testament. One significant usage of φῶς however in the New Testament is its use in the description of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who as light, reveals God the Father and is the sole means for man's spiritual cognizance.

Deductively, this study evaluated the specific usage of the concept in the Johannine writings. The interpretations commonly held concerning the Johannine usage of φῶς are: (1) φῶς denotes the enlightenment of man's intellect; (2) φῶς denotes a spiritual enlightenment of every human being; and (3) φῶς denotes an intellectual but more importantly a spiritual enlightenment of all who have been regenerated in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the conclusion of this writer that the usage of φῶς in the Johannine writings primarily refers to a spiritual enlightening of individuals who have been regenerated in the Lord Jesus Christ and consequently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I A SURVEY OF THE USAGES OF LIGHT	3
The Usages of אור in the Old Testament	3
אור as a Verb	3
אור as a Noun	4
The Usage of φως in the New Testament	5
II USAGE OF φως IN JOHN'S GOSPEL	7
John 1:4-9	7
Context	7
Usage	8
"The life was the light of men"	9
The concept of darkness	12
"The true light, which coming into the world enlightens every man	15
John 3:19-21	18
Context	18
Usage	20
John 5:35	22
Context	22
Usage	23
John 8:12	25
Context	25
Usage	26
John 9:5	30
Context	30
Usage	30

John 11:9-10	32
Context	32
Usage	33
"The light of this world"	33
"The light is not in him"	34
John 12:35, 36, 46	35
Context	35
Usage	36
"Walk while you have the light"	37
"That you may become sons of light"	38
III USAGE OF φῶς IN JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE	40
Background	40
I John 1:5, 7	40
Context	40
Usage	41
I John 2:8-10	45
Context	45
Usage	45
IV CONCLUSION	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

INTRODUCTION

The concept of light and its antithesis darkness have overwhelming occurrences in the historical-religious background of many and various religious groups, and also in the many philosophical treatises throughout history. The Holy Scriptures are permeated with this particular concept of "light" and "darkness." This truth is demonstrated from the very beginning (in Genesis 1:3, to the climactic closing of the Scriptures, where the light of God illumines the New Jerusalem). Whether it be in a cultic or false religious system, or in philosophic discourse, the concept of light almost always in its metaphorical usage is used descriptively of some deity or system of goodness, righteousness, peace, happiness, etc. Darkness, the antithesis of light, is therefore used in these same religious and philosophic atmospheres as signifying evil, death, sadness, ignorance, etc.

Since an in-depth study of "light and darkness" would be so extensive in scope, if all cultic, religious and philosophic usages were evaluated, this thesis will be limited to the usage of "light" (φῶς) as it is employed in the Johannian literature of the New Testament.

First, in Chapter I, there will be a brief survey of the appearances of אור (light) in the Old Testament, as

background for the New Testament usage of φῶς (light), and for clarification of the Johannian usage of φῶς. Second, in Chapter II, a study and evaluation of the usage of φῶς as it appears in John's Gospel will be offered. Third, Chapter III will be a study and evaluation of the usage of φῶς as it appears in the Epistles of John. Fourth, in Chapter IV, a synthesis or conclusion to the Johannian usage of φῶς in the Holy Scriptures will be proposed.

The primary purpose of this thesis, in determining the usage of φῶς in the Johannian writings, is to clarify the misconceptions which are prevalent in society, for example, that all men have within themselves a "spark of divinity." A proper understanding of the use of φῶς in the Johannian writings will show that this belief, which plagues many in the present Ecumenical movement, is heretical in reference to the basic teachings of Scripture.

CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF THE USAGES OF LIGHT

Although this paper will deal primarily with the usage of light by the Apostle John, it is necessary to survey first the usages of light as it appears throughout Scripture.

The Usages of אור in the Old Testament¹

אור as a Verb

As a verb, the word אור (light) denotes the following:

- a. be or become light - give light
 - 1. of the sun, moon and stars (Gen. 1:15, 17)
 - 2. of a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:31; 14:20)
 - 3. sacred lamp (Ex. 25:37; Num. 8:2)
 - 4. figurative of the words of God (Ps. 119:130)
- b. light up, cause to shine (Ps. 77:19; 97:4; Ezek. 43:2; Job 42:24; Ps. 139:12)

¹Usage categories concerning אור vary among the lexicographers. The ensuing survey reflects the organization of the data from Brown, Driver and Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Boston, New York and Chicago: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906), pp. 21-22.

- c. light a lamp (Ps. 18:29)
 - 1. of wood (Isa. 27:11)
 - 2. of an altar (Mal. 1:10)
- d. lighten, as of the eyes - his law (Prov. 29:13; Ps. 13:4; 19:9; Ezra 9:8)
- e. make shine
 - 1. of God's face (Num. 6:25; Ps. 31:11; 67:2)
 - 2. of man's face (Eccl. 8:1)

אור as a Noun

- a. light as diffused in nature, the light of day (Gen. 1:3-5; Job 3:9; 38:19; Ps. 139:12)
- b. morning or the light of dawn (Jud. 16:2; 1 Sam. 14:36; 25:34, 36; 2 Ki. 7:9, etc.)
- c. light of the heavenly luminaries (Isa. 30:26; Psa. 148:3, Ezek. 32:8; Job 31:26, etc.)
- d. day light - light of the wicked (Job 38:5; Amos 8:9)
- e. lightning (Job 36:32; 37:3, 11, 15)
- f. light of a lamp (Prov. 13:9; Jer. 25:10)
- g. light of life (Job 33:30; Psa. 56:14; Isa. 26:19)
- h. light of prosperity (Job 22:28; 30:26; Psa. 97:11)
- i. light of instruction (Prov. 6:23; Isa. 42:6, 49:6; 51:4)
- j. light of a face
 - 1. bright, cheerful (Job 29:24)
 - 2. of the King's favor, betokening (Prov. 16:15)
 - 3. of God (Ps. 4:7; 44:4; 89:16)

k. of Yahweh

1. source of enlightenment, prosperity (Isa. 10:17)
2. light and salvation (Ps. 27:1)
3. as a guide (Mic. 7:8)
4. as everlasting (Isa. 60:19-20)

i. light of joy and happiness (Est. 8:16)

There are other Hebrew words which are used for light, but the Hebrew word אור (light) is the one translated in the LXX as φῶς and is of particular interest in this study.

The Usage of φῶς in the New Testament¹

φῶς, akin to phaō, to give light (from roots pha and pham, expressing light as seen by the eye, and metaphorically, as reaching the mind, whence phaino, to make to appear, planēsos, evident etc.) cp. Eng. phosphorus (lite, light bearing).

Primarily light is a luminous emanation, probably of force, from certain bodies, which enables the eye to discern form and color. Light requires an organ adopted for its reception (Mt. 6:22). Where the eye is absent, or where it has become impaired from any cause, light is useless. Man naturally is unable to receive spiritual light inasmuch as he lacks the capacity for spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). Hence, believers are called "sons of light" (Lk. 16:8), not merely because they have received a revelation from God, but because in the New Birth they have the spiritual capacity for it.

Apart from natural phenomenon, light is used in Scripture of:

¹ Usage categories concerning φῶς vary among the lexicographers. The ensuing survey reflects the organization of the data from W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. II (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1959), pp. 339-40.

1. the glory of God's dwelling place (1 Tim. 6:16)
2. the nature of God (1 Jn. 1:5)
3. the impartiality of God (Js. 1:17)
4. the Lord Jesus Christ as the illuminator of men
(Jn. 1:14, 5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 36, 46;
Acts 13:47)
5. as a means of judgment (Jn. 3:19--not listed by
Vine)
6. the guidance of man (Rom. 2:19)
7. as natural light (Jn. 11:9-10--not listed by Vine)

From this brief survey it is clear that "light," as used in Scripture, has two basic functions. First, light is used descriptively of a natural phenomenon, as the light of the sun, moon and stars. Secondly, light is used extensively in Scripture metaphorically as denoting God's being and of man's intellectual and spiritual cognizance.

CHAPTER II

USAGE OF $\phi\omega\varsigma$ IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

John 1:4-9¹

Context

These verses are nestled in a portion which is commonly referred to as John's Prologue (1:1-18). In this prologue, the person of Jesus Christ is amply described by Leon Morris as follows:

These verses bring before us some of the great thoughts that will be developed as the narrative unfolds, the excellency of Christ, who is the Word of God, the eternal strife between light and darkness, and the witness borne by the Baptist, that greatest of the sons of Israel.²

Christ, as the Word, existed in the beginning; and as such He substantiated His equality with God (vs. 1), as well as His being the creator of all things (vs. 2). Not only then is Christ the creator of all things but He also is the source of life which is given to His creation (vs. 4). And this life thus becomes "the light of men."

¹Unless indicated otherwise, all English Bible citations will be taken from The New American Standard Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, the Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California, 1973).

²Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 71.

It is only because there is life in the Logos that there is life in anything on earth at all. Life does not exist in its own right. It is not even spoken of as made "by" or "through" the word, but as existing "in" Him.¹

The Apostle John continues his introduction by further characterizing particular aspects of Christ as being the "Light of men." He shows that this Light first, shines in darkness; secondly, is not overpowered by darkness; thirdly, is true in its existence; and lastly, is that which enlightens man.

Usage

The determination of the usage of $\phi\omega\varsigma$ in the prologue of John's Gospel presents some difficult problems to the exegete. The major problem can easily be remedied. First, one needs to study the particular context at hand. Secondly, $\phi\omega\varsigma$ needs to be examined in the light of other biblical contexts.

In this context (1:1-18), there are three specific aspects which need to be clarified for a clear understanding of the usage of $\phi\omega\varsigma$: the meaning of "the life was the light of men" (vs. 4); the concept of "darkness" (vs. 5); and the meaning of "the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."

¹ Ibid., p. 83.

"The life was the light of men"

The consideration of this phrase has lent itself to two basic interpretations. The first interpretation deals with φῶς as the illumination of man's intellect. The second interpretation deals with φῶς as the illumination of man's spiritual being.

Those who hold to the first interpretation, that φῶς refers here to an intellectual or a conscious illumination of man, substantiate their position by referring back to verse three where Christ is said to have been the creator of all things and nothing exists apart from Him. There are various interpretations which men have given to support this view such as:

The life of the Word "is the light of men." Having life in Himself, the Word is the source of life in all that lives, and especially of the intellectual and spiritual life of man; and therefore He is said to be the light of men; i.e., the source of intellectual life and knowledge in all their forms.¹

G. T. (J. H. Thayer) equates the light with "intelligence," and explains the verse in this way because the life of men is self-conscious, and thus a fountain of intelligence springs up.²

Those who hold to the above view can be shown to have an irrational concept of the true meaning of this interpretation. As Morris points out, "There is no indication in the context that intelligence is in mind, and

¹Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. I (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 506.

²Morris, The Gospel According to John, p. 83.

in any case there seems no reason for confirming the words to any one aspect of man."¹

The second view which sees ". . . the life was the light of men" as an illumination of man's spiritual being, seems much more in line with what Scripture expresses throughout. This particular aspect can be seen in this expression:

" . . . and the life was the light. . . ." An intimation of the antithesis between spirit and nature. In man the revelation life of the Logos has appeared in the world as light. Consciousness is the light of being. But the life was the light of men not merely as a source of life in that the human spirit has its origin in the Logos; but also as the element of life in that the clearness of the Spirit subsists only through the in-working of the Logos.²

Lange, by this expression, points out that man's conscience is involved in the process of man's enlightenment which must to some extent involve man's intellect. But, the crucial point is the fact that it is man's spirit which is illuminated by an in-working of the personal Logos. The Logos, Jesus Christ, is the light giver and means by which men, those who accept Him as Savior, receive light in this world and are not overcome by darkness.

Lenski, in his commentary, makes the remark that the use of the word ζῶν is never used with reference to

¹ Ibid., p. 83.

² John L. P. Lange, The Gospel of John, translated and edited by Philip Schaff, in vol. XVII of Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (24 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 61.

mere creature life; its character is always heavenly and spiritual, never physical."¹ He continues in his support of light being used in a spiritual sense rather than an intellectual sense by quoting from Luther, Lenker's translation, Postil., 190, etc., which reads:

There has been much foolish speculation as to how the Word of God in its divinity could be a light, which naturally shines and has always given light to the minds of men even among heathen nations. "Therefore, based upon this passage of Scripture, these are all human, Platonic, and philosophical thought, which lead us away from Christ into ourselves; but the evangelist wishes to lead us away from ourselves into Christ. He would not have us diffuse our thoughts among the creatures which he has created, so as to pursue him, search for him, and speculate about him as the Platonic philosophers do; but he wishes to lead us away from this vague and high flown thought and bring us together in Christ. Therefore the light must mean the true light of grace in Christ and not the natural light, which also sinners, Jews, heathen, and devils have, who are the greatest enemies of the light. . . .²

Having evaluated these two interpretations it would seem that both are in John's thoughts to some degree. However, it appears that the predominate emphasis by John is spiritual illumination.

There is probably a characteristic Johannine double meaning here. The life of which John writes is in the first instance the kind of life that we see throughout this earth. But this will call to mind that spiritual life which is so much the more significant, John can speak of it as "the life." Neither will be out of mind here.³

¹R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), p. 39.

²Ibid., pp. 40-41.

³Morris, The Gospel According to John, p. 83.

Clarity is brought to this first point by the evaluation of the second and third points.

The Concept of Darkness

Darkness (σκοτία) is the antithesis of light (φῶς). Whether one chooses to interpret light in verse four as the illumination of man's intellect or the illumination of man's soul, darkness, in either case, is that which is in opposition to or in conflict with that illumination of man, by the light of the Logos.

Bultmann, in his interpretation of this passage, understands darkness as a failure on the part of men to comprehend or understand themselves:

The σκοτία is not an autonomous power existing alongside the φῶς, but it's only because of the light that there is darkness at all and this is because the φῶς has its basis in the ζωή of the creator, because men are creatures who can find the proper understanding of themselves only by returning to their origin.

If it is man's part to understand himself and it is, if the ζωή which called him into existence is for him the φῶς, then this means that he also has the possibility of σκοτία, the possibility that instead of being illuminated by his knowledge of his creatureliness, he should be darkened by turning away from his creator and by the folly of imagining that he has origins in himself.¹

It does not seem reasonable, however, that John is emphasizing darkness due to man's ignorance in comprehending his relationship to his Creator.

¹Rudolf Bultmann, The Gospel of John (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 47.

Others in their evaluation of this expression, "light shines in darkness," tend to see "darkness" as a general term: "The schoolmen well said there is a fourfold darkness of nature, of ignorance, of misery, of sin."¹ Though this expression of "darkness" is true in its broad sense, it appears that John in this particular text is being more specific in his meaning of darkness. In the context, "darkness" appears with the articles τῆ and ἡ. Therefore, John is speaking of a specific darkness and not darkness in general.

The abstract term "darkness," which expresses a quality, is here substituted for the concrete expression "dark world" and sums up in a single word and from one angle all the hostile forces that exist in the fallen world. The darkness of the world is a hostile power full of resistance to the true light of the Logos.²

An important observation is the fact that the tenses of the verbs used (vs. 5), are not the same. In reference to light, the word φαίνει ("is shining") is used, which is the present tense, meaning the light is presently in the process of shining. However, in reference to the darkness, the verb κατέλαβεν (overcome), is used in the aorist tense, where normally one would expect the present tense to be used. The significance can be understood best probably, if one considers it as a constative aorist

¹W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Bible (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1900), p. 113.

²Lenski, Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, p. 44.

denoting the fact of a prolonged conflict having been fought and continuing on. Ryle has this comment in regard to the differences of tenses used here.

About the "light," the present tense is used. "It shineth now as it has always shown; it is still shining." About the "darkness," the past tense is used, "It has not comprehended the light; it never has comprehended it from the first, and does not comprehend it at the present day."¹

Darkness has time and again tried to overcome light. However, from the very beginning, light has prevailed. From creation, the chaos and darkness which enveloped the earth was dispensed, and light was given by God to bring order to this disorder (cf. Gen. 1:3). Some make reference to man's fall as the meaning which underlies the "darkness" expressed here by John.

The darkness to which the evangelist refers has a concrete meaning. It refers to fallen mankind, darkened by sin and unbelief. . . . This darkness is synonymous with "the world" of verse 10. It is the antagonist of Christ, the light. It is an active personal darkness, it did not accept or appropriate the light.²

Westcott supports this statement of "darkness" making this reference to man's fall:

The fall presupposed man's fellowship with God broken. Man has isolated himself. He has made for himself an atmosphere of darkness, by seeking to sever his life

¹J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, St. John, vol. 1 (3 vols.; New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1875), p. 12.

²William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to John, vol. 1 in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), p. 73.

from the source of life. For all that is without God, apart from Him, is darkness compare 1 Jn. 1:15.¹

The author of this paper feels that the "light" in John 1:5 points to a spiritual illumination, and the "darkness" is that which does not possess the "source" of light. This light is the Logos who is identified in 1:1, 14, as being the person of Jesus Christ.

"The true light, which coming into the world enlightens every man"

These words, appearing in John 1:9, have given exegeses the most trouble in determining a meaning for φῶς. This verse is commonly referred to as the "Quaker's Verse." J. William Frost makes the following observation of this verse in regard to its significance to Quaker theology.

Quaker theology began with, was structured by, and concluded with the inward light of Christ. All of these words were essential. The experience was "inward" and therefore subject to no external proof. Grace was "light" and brought knowledge. And since "the inward light" was "of Christ," the subjective illumination was equal to the revelation of God described in the New Testament.²

In other words, the above quotation would lead one to believe that every individual possesses a "spark of divinity." However, this must be considered an error if Scripture is taken in its entirety. If there were no other

¹B. F. Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 51.

²J. William Frost, "The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology," Christian History, 39 (December 1970), 522-23.

verses than Romans 3:10, 23, these alone would be ample to show that no man at any time has had such a "spark of divinity" existing within him. There is today a resurgence of this same type of theological view in the ecumenical movement. Thus, it is paramount that one understands clearly the teaching of John 1:9 as to how "the light enlightens every man."

Hendriksen appropriately summarizes the varying interpretations of this phrase, "the light which enlightens every man."¹

- a) Christ, who is the light, actually grants spiritual illumination, in the highest and fullest sense of the term, to every human being dwelling on earth without exception.
- b) He grants this spiritual illumination, which renews both heart and mind, to every covenant-child (whether elect or not). Some lose it again.
- c) He grants this supreme blessing to every man who is saved; in the sense that not one of the saved receives his illumination from any other source.
- d) He bestows upon every human individual without exception, the light of reason and conscience.
- e) He illumines every man who hears the Gospel; i.e., he imparts a degree of understanding concerning spiritual matters (not necessarily resulting in salvation) to all those whose ears and minds are reached by the message of salvation. The majority, however, do not respond favorably. Many who have the light prefer the darkness. Some however, due entirely to the sovereign, saving grace of God, receive the word with the proper attitude of heart and mind, and obtain everlasting life.

¹ Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to John, I, 77-78.

In evaluating the above considerations, it is obvious that neither "a" nor "b" can be seen as having any significance, for the mere reason that they have no supportive basis when considered in the light of Scripture as a whole. The considerations of both "c" and "d" are true to an extent but stop short of that to which the Apostle John is referring. The last option would seem to be that which John is trying to express in this particular instance in view of the whole context of the prologue compared with Scripture as a whole. Hendriksen gives supportive evidence why this point "e" is that which John is emphasizing.

Although "d" is favored by eminent conservative exegetes and proclaims an element of truth that must not be denied, we do not believe that in this context--or anywhere in the Fourth Gospel where the term light (φῶς) is used--the reference is specifically to the light of reason and conscience. We accept the position that the light of which John speaks is the life of God in Christ--and therefore Christ Himself--made manifest to the world by the preaching of the Gospel.¹

Taking into consideration Romans 1:17-20, it is evident that to some degree men have been given a certain amount of light that causes them to be accountable before God for their sins. This light is referred to as "Common or Universal Grace" and is clarified by A. H. Strong's quotation:

We grant that there is a universal gift of the Holy Spirit, if by the Holy Spirit is meant the natural light of reason and conscience, and the manifold impulses to good which struggle against the evil of man's nature. Universal grace does not remove man's

¹ Ibid., p. 78.

depravity or man's condemnation (Rom. 5:12-19, Eph. 2:3). It only puts side by side with that depravity and condemnation influences and impulses which counteract the evil and urge the sinner to repentance.¹

God has illumined man through various means in the past (Heb. 1:1). However, it would appear that the main thrust which John brings to our attention is that this "light" has been shown to man through the incarnate Christ. Christ is "the true light" (ἀλήθινος that one who is "real," "genuine," "authentic"). He has always existed (Jn. 1:1), but now he appeared before man in human form (1:18) as the true "Light" (1:9), yet man refused to accept Him and remained in their spiritual darkness (1:10).²

The light which had been in all human life was now seen coming into clear shining in the Person of One who in flesh dwelt among men. It was not a new presence, but a new manifestation.³

John 3:19-21

Context

Chapter three of John's Gospel records the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to Him by night. Verses 1-10 record the contents of this dialogue between them.

¹A. G. Strong, Systematic Theology (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press), p. 603.

²For a full development of this argument see Irvin Robertson, "The True Light, That Lighteth Every Man, A Critical Investigation of John 1:9." Unpublished thesis (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1949).

³G. Campbell Morgan, The Analyzed Bible (Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909), p. 14.

John records this conversation because it really constitutes a summary of Jesus' teaching, dealing, as it does with the Kingdom, regeneration, faith, the son of man, God's love and the plan of salvation, judgment and unbelief. Here in the opening chapters of John's Gospel this conversation with Nicodemus presents a grand summary of the gospel itself.¹

Following this dialogue (vss. 1-10), Jesus gives his discourse (vss. 11-20), in which he exposes the system with which Nicodemus is affiliated. His affiliation was with the Pharisaic sect, based on the law and the traditions of the elders as the means for securing their salvation. Jesus exposed these traditions as error and therefore not acceptable to God the Father.

Verses 11-16 show the purpose of the Son's appearance. He is the object of God's love and was sent into this world to reveal the Father (1:1-18). He is the one who gave his life for many, so they would believe on the Son as the only means for personal salvation.

Verses 11-21 clarify the significance of Christ's coming (i.e. not that he should "judge the world" but "that the world should be saved through Him"). However, judgment is upon the world as a result of Christ's coming, because He, being "light," exposed the darkness of this world. Man's rejection of this "light," being Christ (1:10), resulted in judgment upon themselves.

The chapter concludes (vss. 23-36) by showing that Jesus' mission in this world exceeded and far surpassed the

¹ Lenski, Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, p. 227.

mission to which John the Baptist had been called. This fact is substantiated in the first chapter (vss. 6-8), and here reiterated: Jesus Christ is the "true light" which has come into the world.

Usage

The use of $\phi\omega\varsigma$ in John 3 is more readily discerned than was presented in chapter one. By reading the context it is clear that Jesus is the central figure considered here. In 3:16 the expressed purpose is given why Jesus Christ came into the world. God loved this world and desired that men should be saved from this world's darkness. This could only be accomplished through one's belief in Christ. Then, too, 3:17 points to the fact that Christ's mission to earth was ultimately designed to save mankind. Inevitably, however, the mission simultaneously resulted in the judgment of the world.

$\kappa\rho\iota\sigma\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ means to "discriminate" and the medium of discrimination is light. Christ came into this world as life and light, to save the world and not to condemn it. Men by their response to the manifestation of the light declare themselves, and so announce their own 'judgment.'

The use of $\phi\omega\varsigma$ here primarily points to the person of Jesus Christ, that he is light in His very being. However, the idea of light can be seen in its metaphorical meaning, whereby "light" stands for that which is good,

¹C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 210.

right, true, etc. as against that which is "darkness," representing all evil, ignorance, falsehood, etc. Lenski appropriately notes concerning John 3:19:

"The light" with its significant article really means "the spirit" the son himself (1:4, 5) who as "the truth" (14:6) brings the complete revelation of God (1:18; 13:11) and makes it shine into men's minds and hearts. In Jesus all the divine realities (this is the meaning of ἀλήθεια or "truth") concerning God, His Grace and His love, His power to redeem and to save, lie open and bare so that men must see their sinning. This light "has come," and the perfect tense implies that it is now here and continues thus.¹

In contrast to "light" here again the antithesis, "darkness" is expressed. Ryle says that, "Darkness . . . in this sentence means moral darkness and mental darkness, sin, ignorance, superstition, and irreligion."²

John reveals here that Jesus, "the light of this world" (cf. 8:12), has come to mankind in order that man too may become enlightened. Yet man rejects this light because his deeds are evil and he loves darkness. The word for "deeds" or "works" is ἔργα. This word is significant and identifies these "works" not as scattered, individual deeds, but rather they exhibit the deeds of man, in a consistent, collective fashion. In other words, these works characterize their lifestyle. By nature they resist "light"; they are depraved. This is each man's plight

¹ Lenski, Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, pp. 270-71.

² Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, St. John, I, 164.

unless he comes to the "light," so that his "deeds" or "manner of life" may be changed.

The contrast between the two men in verses 20-21 does not support a system of works leading to salvation. This is what Jesus refuses in his dialogue with Nicodemus. The significant meaning which the Lord expresses is that the man, who has believed in the "light," has his deeds "wrought in God." There are various reasons for this: he has been born again (3:3), he is experiencing communion and fellowship with the "light," and he no longer needs to avoid the "light."

John 5:35

Context

Here in chapter 5:1-18, Jesus appears at a feast which is being conducted by the Jews in the city of Jerusalem. In the course of events, Jesus performs another miracle, that of healing a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. This act incites a mob of Jews which begins to persecute Jesus and demands that He be killed because He had both performed this miracle on the Sabbath and had called God His own Father, thus making Himself equal with God.

Verses 19-21 clarify the manner by which Jesus is essentially united with the Father.

Nowhere else in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission

and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship, as we find in this discourse.¹

These verses clarify Jesus' unity with the Father. First, whatever the Father does, "these things the son does in like manner" (vs. 19). Secondly, as the Father raises the dead and gives life, "so the Son gives life to whom He wishes" (vs. 21). Thirdly, the Father does not judge anyone, but "He has given all judgment to the Son" (vs. 22). Fourthly, whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him (vs. 23).

The chapter closes with Jesus' discourse (vss. 30-47) in which He clarifies the nature of his unity with the Father through a series of testimonies. First (vss. 30-31), He disclaims self-testimony. Secondly (vss. 33-35), we have the testimony of John the Baptist. Finally (vss. 39-47), we have the testimony of Jesus as recorded in the Scriptures.

Usage

John 5:35 is significant in the study of the usage of the word $\phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ in that it designates how a human being is seen as "light" in comparison with Jesus Christ the "true light."

In 5:35, John the Baptist, who was appointed from the outset as the forerunner of the "true light" (1:6-8), came as a witness to Christ, but he was "not the true light." Here he is spoken of as a lamp ($\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\chi\nu\omicron\varsigma$), which

¹ Ibid., p. 311.

when it gives forth light, but in and of itself, it does not represent a "true light." John is an instrument who sheds light, but who did not possess the means to produce that light in and of himself. An understanding of this principle can be clarified by the illustration of the sun and moon. As one looks into the skies at night, he sees a light beaming forth from the moon. However, this light is not produced by the moon; rather, the moon is only reflecting light which has its origin in the sun. One might say the moon is a reflector in the night. It gives forth light but its light does not originate in and of itself (so is the example given in John 5:35). The Baptist gives forth "light" in that he is a reflection of the "true light" shining through him. He exhibits characteristics such as love, goodness, righteousness, etc., which are signified in Scripture metaphorically through the concept of light; however, he is able to appear as such only because he has been born of God (cf. Jn. 3).

Light in Scripture is a common means by which God has manifested himself to mankind. Lange makes a significant comment concerning this point:

The prophetic vision of the manifestation of Jehovah is announced and marked by the token of light and fire combined (Ezek. 1:13); by light and fire the advent of the Messiah is heralded and proclaimed (Zech. 14:7; Mal. 3:2). All these tokens of light and fire meet in the Baptist. He is the flame-signal of the Messiah,

the last Old Testament form of the pillar of fire and of the candle-stick in the temple; therefore, the lamp, at once flaming and shining.¹

John the Baptist, as a "lamp," represented the Lord before men prior to His coming. Men rejoiced and accepted John's preaching; they were seemingly aroused by his message of the "coming Light." "They were willing to rejoice for awhile in his light," yet they failed to see the import of his message. It appears that they were moved, illuminated at least in an intellectual or conscious recognition of the light (cf. 1:9); yet, they were not illumined in their spirits. In other words, outwardly they conformed to the message of "light"; yet, inwardly their hearts were darkened. Therefore, because of their evil deeds, they loved the darkness rather than the light. This ultimately led to their rejection of John the Baptist as a messenger of that "true light" (Jn. 3:19-21).

The results which are observed in John 5:35, have existed throughout history and exist in our presence as Jesus has predicted: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you" (Jn. 15:18).

John 8:12

Context

Chapter eight of John's Gospel picks up at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles discussed in Chapter

¹Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 193.

seven. This feast marked the completion of the harvest, and historically commemorated the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness after having come out of Egypt. Imagery held a significant part in this festival; one such image was that of light which was used symbolically to represent God's guidance by the pillar of fire during these wilderness wanderings.

As chapter eight opens, it appears that the feast has concluded and the crowds have dispersed (7:53), Jesus finds himself being confronted by his adversaries, the Pharisees. They bring an adulterous woman before Him. After having dealt with the woman and her needs, Jesus subsequently addresses the crowd, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (vs. 12). The Pharisees challenge Jesus' statement by saying that no one can give witness of himself. To this Jesus replies that His witness is true, because he knows where He has come from and where He is going. In other words, Jesus substantiates the fact that He is the "true light" which, coming into the world, enlightens every man" (cf. Jn. 1:4-5).

Usage

The question is, what is meant by Jesus' statement, "I am the light of the world"? The apparent reason for Jesus making such a statement as He does has been generally attributed to two basic considerations. First, Jesus

was fulfilling the symbolism which had been exhibited in the Feast of Tabernacles and which would have been engraved upon the minds of those present. This would appear to be a likely allusion for Jesus to make here. The ceremony symbolized God's guidance, protection and salvation of His people in the wilderness wanderings where He had appeared to them in the form of light, the "pillar of fire." Lange holds to this view:

The manifestation of Jehovah is always preceded by a token of light and fire. The indication of this appears even in Gen. 3:24; 15:17. By the burning bush, Ex. 3:2; by the pillar of fire, Ex. 13. A permanent typical symbol of the manifestation of God in Israel was the candlestick in the temple; its complement being the fire upon the altar.¹

Jesus here in John 8:12 alludes to this symbol of God's presence as an opportunity to bring to the crowd's attention the fact that He and the Father are one (Jn. 5) and that He is the ultimate revelation of God to the world (Jn. 1:18). Therefore, He makes this claim of being "the light of the world."

A second consideration has been given for the reason that Christ makes the statement, "I am the light of the world." Its contention is that "light" as used in Scripture is an "emblem of holiness and righteousness and that Christ is the vindicator of God's holiness and righteousness which fits this context being fulfilled as seen in the

¹ Ibid.

incidence of the adulterous woman."¹ Jesus said if anyone of you is without sin let him throw the first stone. After all the accusers had left, Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more" (8:11). The implication is that Jesus was the only one without sin, thus He could forgive sin because He was the "true light."

Both of these considerations have elements of truth as it relates to φῶς; however, because of the immediate context the latter consideration seems to be the point emphasized by John.

How could these Pharisees know for sure that Jesus truly was who He claimed to be? In response to this, the following statement needs to be evaluated.

How can light convince us that it is light except by what it does for us? We do not demonstrate that light is light by treatises, or by analysis of its constituent rays. It is only light to us when it illumines and quickens us.²

The problem facing the Pharisees here is that they are blinded spiritually. They are not following after Christ; thus, they are unable to be enlightened "spiritually" by Christ who is the "true light."

A significant word here is ἀκολουθῶς ("one who follows"). This word is used often in reference to Jesus' disciples (cf. Mt. 9:9; 8:19; 19:21; Mk. 1:18, 2:14, etc.).

¹Pink, Exposition of the Book of John, p. 25.

²H. D. A. Major, The Mission and Message of Jesus (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1938), p. 799.

In other words, one who "follows" Christ is one who comes to Him; he forsakes this world and is born anew into an existence centered in Christ (Jn. 3). Understanding what it means to follow Christ clarifies the statement "shall have the light of life."

The genitive "the light of life," is not appositional, so that "the life" is identified with "the light." Nor is it the genitive of origin, so that "the light" proceeds from "the life" (Jesus). This is the simple possessive genitive, "the light" which belongs to "the life" and is invisibly connected with it. Thus, light and life are distinct concepts. The former here is identified with Jesus, the latter is elsewhere also identified with him. By making the second a genitive the two clasp hands in this case: Jesus is the light, and this light is always linked with life.¹

Jesus is "light" in that he possesses all that God is. And as "light," he is the source whereby man can experience life, that is spiritual life, because Jesus in and of himself is life. He has always existed, and he ever will exist. Thus, Jesus stands as the light of this world. He is the source of life for this world in the spiritual realm (8:12).

Jesus is the light of the world; i.e. to the ignorant he proclaims wisdom; to the impure, holiness; to those in sadness, gladness. Moreover, to those who by sovereign grace are drawn (6:44) to the light and follow its guidance he not only proclaims but actually imparts these blessings.²

¹ Lenski, Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, p. 597.

² Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to John, I, 41.

John 9:5

Context

In John nine, the apostle records the account of Jesus' healing of the blind man. Jesus had healed blind individuals at other times throughout His ministry (Mt. 9:27-31; 12:22; 15:30; Mk. 8:22-26; Lk. 7:21, etc.); however, in this particular instance, the healing emphasizes the important point that Jesus is "the light of this world." The chapter begins with the physical act of giving sight (vss. 1-7) and ends on a significant note with the spiritual act of giving sight (vss. 35-38). Nestled between these two climactic points are other occurrences: verses 8-12 express the effects which the physical healing of this blind man had on his neighbors; verses 13-34 express the feeling that the healing of the blind man aroused in the Pharisees; verses 35-38 express the spiritual healing which came to the blind man; and verses 39-49 express the spiritual blindness which characterized the Pharisees.

Usage

The first problem which develops in this particular verse is the translation of $\delta\tau\alpha\nu$. The usual translation for $\delta\tau\alpha\nu$ is "whenever"; however, in this case, it would seem better to translate $\delta\tau\alpha\nu$, "as long as." Scholars differ to a considerable degree as to which meaning is the best rendering. If $\delta\tau\alpha\nu$ is translated as "whenever," as Westcott

does, the following interpretation of the phrase, "the light of the world," is emphasized:

Whenever I am in the world (ὅταν ὦ). The indefinite form of the statement suggests the thought of a manifold revelation of the Word. Whensoever and not only during that revelation which was then in the course of being fulfilled, but also in the time of the Patriarchs, and of the Law, and of the Prophets, and through the later ages of the church, Christ is the light of the world.¹

If, on the other hand, ὅταν is translated "as long as," as Lenski, Hendriksen and Morris do, the following interpretation of "the light of the world" is emphasized:

The use of ὅταν, which generally means "whenever" when it is construed with the subjunctive, is unusual. To say that it has the idea of duration is hardly the point. The ἕαν in the compound ὅταν rather points to the indefinite length of Jesus' stay in the world. He expects to stay for a time yet, but he withholds mention of how long this will be.²

This author feels that ὅταν would best be translated here "as long as," because Jesus, at this point, is existing in His incarnate form. At this particular point in history, Christ as "light" has chosen to reveal Himself in human form. He has only a short time in which He will be here on earth, in His human body, as God's revelatory figure. Thus, He is urging men, throughout His ministry, to follow Him in order that they may experience spiritual "light," which only comes through believing in Him and no longer being swept along by the disillusionment of this world's "darkness."

¹Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 145.

²Lenski, Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, pp. 678-79.

The significant use of the word $\phi\omega\varsigma$ in this context would probably best be seen as follows:

I am the light of the world, vs. 5, has no relation to the figure of day and night, vs. 4. It is chosen with reference to the special work which the Lord must now accomplish in giving physical and spiritual light in the one born blind.¹

Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Here, before making a blind man see, He says, "I am the light of the world." Throughout the Gospels, Jesus attests His deity through the performance of His miracles. In this particular miracle, Jesus not only is giving witness to the fact that He is truly deity, but He stresses a particular characteristic which deity possesses. God is "light" (1 Jn. 1:5); Jesus, being equal with God, is also "light." He is the giver of "light," both physical (Jn. 9:1-7) and also, more importantly, spiritual (Jn. 9:35-39). Jesus thus uses the figurative sense of $\phi\omega\varsigma$ as an extension of the physical illustration.

John 11:9-10

Context

The account of John eleven brings us to the closing stages of Jesus' ministry on this earth. Jesus has performed many miracles in His short visit, and as things begin to

¹F. L. Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, Vol. II (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 128.

accelerate toward His death, He performs one of His greatest miracles: the raising of Lazarus. This showed His followers again that He was truly deity. He is the source of life in this world. The emphasis is on physical life, and, no doubt, spiritual life as well.

Usage

φῶς appears twice in these verses. It first appears in verse nine as "the light of this world." This is a common expression that has been used before (1:9; 8:12; 9:5). The second appearance is in verse ten, "the light is not in him."

"The light of this world"

In the context which this phrase appears, it would undoubtedly be certain that it is referring to the sun, that body which is the source of earth's natural light. When Jesus therefore tells His followers that this is all the time available for them to walk or do their work, He means that "the light" illumining them would be that of the sun. We have a classical method of Jesus' teachings, in that He uses familiar popular phenomena to teach deeper spiritual truths. He moves from the concrete to the abstract.

Jesus, because of His works and His teachings, has gathered around Him not only a crowd of faithful followers, but also a crowd of adversaries. His adversaries have continued to persecute Him and are constantly seeking to

put Him to death (as was prophesied of old), but the time is not yet at hand. In John 9:4 Jesus says, "we must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming when no man can work." It is clear that Jesus is pointing to His death which will soon come, and the need is present that He who is "the light of the world" draw men to Himself and away from the clasp of the evil "darkness" of this world.

John, in chapter eleven, points to the fact that Jesus is rapidly approaching the time of his death; yet the time is still future.

Jesus replied that He could walk in safety while it was day. In the Father's calendar for Him, it was still day (cf. 9:4). The night, though not far off, had not yet arrived. As He put it on other occasions, His "hour" had not yet come (2:4; 7:30). There is a principle here that all do well to remember. As long as one is fulfilling God's specific plan and until that plan is accomplished, there is nothing that God's servant need fear. He can only rely upon God's protection, for angels are deployed to give strength and preservation (cf. Ps. 91).¹

"The light is not in him"

In verse ten night is spoken of in a literal way, just as verse nine makes reference to a literal day, guided by the sun's light. Jesus again uses a common, everyday picture to illustrate spiritual truth. At night, without light, it would seem natural that one would stumble as he walks.

¹Homer A. Kent, Jr., Light In the Darkness (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), pp. 146-47.

It is obvious that ultimately a spiritual significance is being emphasized by Jesus. The raising of Lazarus seems to be the climax of Jesus' miracles, and the purpose was to manifest to the crowd that Jesus had power over death. He truly is deity, the "true light" of this world. This emphasis again illustrates the battle which has always existed between light and darkness. Some of the crowd believed in Jesus; they received His light and thus were illuminated spiritually (vs. 45). Yet, others, though enlightened intellectually with what had happened, refused to believe in Him, and they all the more sought to kill Him (vss. 46-53). This emphasized their deeds as evil and their loving "darkness" rather than "light" (Jn. 3:19-21).

John 12:35, 36, 46

Context

In chapter twelve is the last appearance of φῶς in John's Gospel which would seem to be of significance. Christ throughout His earthly ministry claimed for Himself the title of "the light of the world." Here in chapter twelve, Jesus brings to a close His public ministry. This chapter exposes another example where darkness attempts to extinguish the light. This is exemplified by Judas Iscariot's response to Mary's anointing of Jesus. The chapter continues with the description of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. This event is followed by His last public discourse pointing to His soon death, which arouses

in the listeners the question, ". . . who is this son of Man?" (vs. 34). Jesus explains His earthly mission (vss. 35-50), which as prophesied by Isaiah would be misunderstood, because their eyes were blinded and their hearts hardened (vs. 40). As Jesus was not received at the outset of His ministry (1:10), so now at its consummation, many still do not accept Him. However dim the light might appear, darkness still does not overcome the light.

Usage

To understand φῶς in verses 35-36, it is necessary to understand Christ's reason for making this statement. In the preceding verse (vs. 34), the crowd is seen asking the question, "who is this son of Man?" These people have followed Jesus; they have heard His claims and observed His works and teachings. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah (the anointed one); at birth, He was called Immanuel (God with us). They saw the Messiah as being a kingly figure, yet here was Jesus a mere man, a servant, and now one who was about to be killed. How could this one be the Messiah?

Jesus answers their questions (vss. 35-36) not with a boastful claim, but subtly, "for a little while longer, the light is among you." Jesus does not make any emphatic statements as He has done prior to this (i.e. 8:12, 9:15, "I am the light of the world"). Since Jesus says that the light is only with them for a little while longer, it is

obvious that He is speaking about Himself; man has always had the sun's natural light.

Two expressions appear in verses 35 and 36 which clarify the meaning of φῶς. The first expression is "walk while you have the light," and the second is "that you may become sons of light."

"Walk while you have the light"

The word περιπατεῖτε (walk about) is an imperative which denotes a strong exhortation. Hengstenberg notes that to "walk in the light," "denotes activity and stands opposed to an idle and indifferent rest."¹ This word occurs again in the verse. It is a present participle, περιπατῶν, which may be taken figuratively as a manner of lifestyle. The habitual action pictured that of living "in darkness." It is evil, wrong or simply contrary to the "light" (that which is good, proper, holy).

Verse 36 expresses our manner of lifestyle by a different expression. Instead of "walk in the light" the phrase reads "believe in the light." The former is an outward demonstration of the latter's inward attitude. Thus, the emphasis admits a spiritual interpretation for the whole expression. The expression "that darkness may not overtake you" lends support to a spiritual emphasis here. "Darkness" as the antithesis of "light" points commonly

¹Hengstenberg in Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, St. John, II, 363.

to man's failure to receive spiritual light, which fits this context well.

Hendriksen adds an appropriate note at this juncture:

To be sure, natural man, even though the Gospel be preached to him, does not have an inner, experiential spiritual insight into the mysteries of God and of redemption. Such knowledge is wholly reserved for the children of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Nevertheless, any man to whom the Gospel is proclaimed receives a certain amount of illumination. He knows the way of righteousness and in that sense he has the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (11 Pet. 2:20, 21). Think of Balaam, King Saul, Judas, Demas, and others. But in spite of all this, ever so many people who hear the Gospel do not walk in the light; i.e. they do not show by their daily conduct that they have accepted and appropriated the truth as proclaimed by Christ, the light.¹

To "walk while you have the light" is obviously an exhortation by Jesus directed to this crowd to trust Him in order that they be "born again" (Jn. 3:3) and experience a saving knowledge of the "true light."

"That you may become sons of light"

To be a "son of" means to be "characterized by or influenced by some quality or thing or representing some quality of character."² Major points out the significant use of the genitive "of light" here. The genitive "of light" indicates the essential quality of a man. Thus,

¹Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel of John, I, 207-08.

²Funk and Wagnalls, Standard College Dictionary (New York: Harper & Row Publishing Co., 1977), p. 1278.

a son of light is an enlightened man.¹ Morris adds:

"Sons of light" are accordingly not merely men with a slight interest in light, but men whose lives have been so revolutionized that they may be characterized with reference to light (cf. Lk. 16:8; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thes. 5:5). One cannot be a follower of Jesus and be half-hearted about the light.²

Thus, the obvious meaning of φῶς here is a reference to the person of Jesus Christ who by nature is opposed to that which is "darkness" and thus, the only means for man's escape from his natural state of darkness into a state of experiencing God's glorious light.

Jesus further substantiates His being the light of mankind and of the world by the clear statement in 12:46, "I have come as light into the world." The ἐγώ here is emphatic denoting the importance of Jesus' coming. φῶς does not appear with the article in 8:12, and 9:5, signifying Jesus is stressing His essential being. Christ's purpose in coming was that He might demonstrate His essential being. He has come as light so that "everyone who believes" in Him would not remain in darkness. Here again, the significance of φῶς is in reference to a spiritual illumination of man's soul.

¹Major, The Mission and Message of Jesus, p. 862.

²Morris, The Gospel According to John, p. 601.

CHAPTER III

USAGE OF $\phi\omega\varsigma$ IN JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

Background

The First Epistle of John attributes its authorship to the same author as that of the Gospel of John. This epistle differs somewhat from most other New Testament epistles due to the fact that no particular address, signature, or destination is specified. A clear example of the unity between I John and the Fourth Gospel is that they both have a strong emphasis on the incarnation and such topics as "light and darkness."¹

I John 1:5, 7

Context

Chapter one of I John begins with a formal prologue (vss. 1-4) as does the first chapter of John's Gospel (vss. 1-18). Many of the concepts and expressions are almost identical within these two prologues. Probably the most significant similarity is the emphasis on the incarnation: John 1:1, "in the beginning was"; I John 1:1, "what was from the beginning." The first chapter of John's Epistle

¹See syllabus by Dr. James Boyer: Study in the Johannine Epistle (unpublished class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary), pp. 1-4.

clarifies what the witnesses had heard concerning the "Word of Life." Through their witness, others would also experience this "Life," which originates in the Father. The message is summarized in verse five: "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

Finally, in verses six through ten, the response is given concerning one's relationship to God who is light.

Usage

φῶς appears twice in 1 John 1. The first occurrence is in verse five, "God is light"; and, the second is in verse seven, "if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light."

What is the meaning of "God is light"? Up to this point it is apparent that φῶς has been attributed specifically in John's Gospel to the Person of Jesus Christ ("I am the light of the world," etc.). How do these two expressions, "God is light" and "I am the light," which are penned by the same author, relate?

In order to come to any type of conclusion on this point, it is necessary first to come to some understanding of what John means here by the phrase, "God is light." It appears there are two major views.

The first of these views, held by various scholars, sees the meaning of "God is light," as focusing upon God's nature, His essential being. The same is true of such

phrases as: "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4:8); "He is Righteous" (1 Jn. 2:29); or "God is Life" (1 Jn. 5:20). Robert Law interprets the significance of the phrase as follows: "'That God is Light' expresses the self-revelation of God: first, as a necessity that belongs to His moral nature; secondly, as the source of all moral illumination."¹

Law continues in his explanation of why he believes the first view, while correct in its concepts as relating to God's nature, is not the emphasis of John's thought in this particular context:

While this interpretation of the Light as absolute Holiness or Love serves admirably for this simple sentence (1:5), taken by itself, it will be found that it entirely dislocates the continuity of thought that runs through the paragraph (1:5, 2:2). Examining this paragraph as a whole, we find that the unifying idea is not the Light, but is the fellowship with God. St. John does not introduce the thought that God is Light as an independent thesis. Light is the medium in which fellowship between God and man is consciously realized; the first element which He and we may possess in common.²

Law has some key insights to add in regard to the interpretation of "God is light." However, his interpretation which seeks to emphasize fellowship, which is a key to the context, stops short of a complete interpretation. This author feels that both views need to clasp hands, then one will understand John's complete thought in writing his Epistle. Verses six through ten point out that the importance

¹ Robert Law, The Tests of Life (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1914), p. 58.

² Ibid., pp. 58-59.

of fellowship is first initiated and then perpetuated. In order for a Christian to have fellowship, he needs to have an understanding to some degree of who God is. How can one follow a person of whom he has no knowledge? However, this knowledge is gained only by a change in each individual which is brought about by belief in Christ, "the true light of this world." Men can philosophize and theorize concerning the concept of "God is light." This they have done through the centuries, and God laughs at these futile attempts of men. Jesus came into this world as light to illumine man so that he could know who God is. "God is light"; He is holy, transcendent, pure, etc. No man can look upon Him nor come before Him except through the person of Jesus Christ.

Light was an obvious symbol for God, especially since on occasion God revealed Himself in fire and light. God could be said to be clothed in light and glory (Ps. 104:2) and hence too bright for men to behold (1 Tim. 6:16).¹

In realizing that God is holy, righteous, etc., that He is "light," how does one "walk in the light as He Himself is in the light"? "'To walk in the light' is to come into the sphere where God Himself is to be found, or rather to live in the same way as God Himself."² Marshall's simple statement seems logical. The question then becomes,

¹J. Howard Marshall, "The Epistles of John," in The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 109.

²Ibid., p. 111.

how does one live in the same manner that God does? The obvious answer is by having God live in that person through the person of Jesus Christ so that he, by submitting to Christ's guidance, lets this light shine through him.

The spiritual emphasis or illumination of light is central. John is not referring to man's intellectual illumination or knowledge of God.

Again, as in John's Gospel, the word "walk about" appears (περιπατῶμεν, vs. 6) in the present tense metaphorically denoting a habitual action or continuous lifestyle. It is in opposition to "light." This is a clear sign that the person has never come to the true light nor received eternal life. "To walk in darkness is to walk in sin; to walk in sin is to follow the dictates of our own natural minds and hearts."¹

"God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." Men can never approach God on their own merits. Only through the person of Jesus Christ can men see God. This was the purpose for Christ's coming. Christ being "light" shows God to mankind and makes it possible for man to come back to God. Jesus is the means by which men can see God as light, initially being saved and becoming a child of light, but from then on, Jesus continues to be

¹ H. A. Ironside, Addresses on the Epistles of John, (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, Bible Trust Depot, 1945), p. 24.

the means whereby one's sins are continually forgiven (1 Jn. 2:1).

Forgiveness is effective to the sinner whenever he acknowledges his sin after having yielded to a sinful act (1 Jn. 1:9). Then he is reinstated into fellowship with God.

The use of $\phi\omega\varsigma$ would then denote, in the first chapter of 1 John, both the nature of God and also the moral, spiritual condition necessary for any individual in order to have fellowship with God.

1 John 2:8-10

Context

The Apostle John continues in 1 John 2 with two additional tests to evaluate the life of an individual who claims to be walking in light. Verses one through six express the test of obedience. Here again is a theme which is predominant in John's Gospel (cf. Jn. 14:21). John adds a third test (vss. 7-11) whereby a believer can evaluate his life to see if he is truly walking in the "light." This third test is the test of love for the brethren. It is through this third test that the final appearance of $\phi\omega\varsigma$ appears in John's Epistle.

Usage

In order that $\phi\omega\varsigma$ be understood in this passage, the meaning of two expressions have to be decided upon. The

first expression is the meaning of "the darkness is passing away," and the second expression is the meaning of "the true light is already shining."

In regard to this first statement, "the darkness is passing away," the meaning undoubtedly can be determined by a re-examination of the context. John is writing this epistle to Christians who are unstable in their faith due to an influx of heretical doctrines with which they are being bombarded. The apostle has presented a series of three tests thus far whereby these wavering Christians can know if they truly are saved and walking in "the light." Coupled with these tests of assurance of salvation is the established fact that the concept of darkness metaphorically denotes evil, sin, etc., or basically anything contrary to God and the truth of His Word (1:5-6). Man's condition by nature is sinful (Rom. 3:23), placing him in a state of darkness and making him positionally separated from God. The present tense of *παράγεται* (pass) in 1 John 2:8 denotes a process taking place which translated means "the darkness is passing away." The reason for this darkness passing away undoubtedly is due to the presence of the light which is shining (*φαίνει* --also a present tense). Whenever light is present, whether it be in the physical or spiritual realm, the result will always be that darkness will recede (cf. Jn. 1:5). Gingrich has the following remark as to the meaning of darkness used in this passage:

This darkness is the natural darkness in which men are born: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts" Eph. 4:18. If he persists in rejecting the light, there may come a day when God withdraws the light (Jer. 13:16).¹

It would seem that a natural understanding of darkness herein is as Gingrich has stated, which is denoting men as existing in their natural sinful state. Having come to this conclusion on the meaning of "the darkness which is passing away," the reason for this darkness passing can be understood by a proper understanding of the phrase, "the true light is already shining."

Westcott makes a significant observation on John's affirmation:

το φῶς το ἀληθινόν--The addition of the epithet ἀληθινόν (cf. v. 20) which is found only here and John 1:9 (note) with φῶς, makes the light as that which fulfilled all that had been promised by the preparatory, partial, and even fictitious, lights which had existed in the world before. If we endeavor to fix the meaning of "the light" here, it can be best done by the help of "the Word," the "true light" was ever coming into the world! Now by the mission of the Holy Spirit, sent in His name, He was shining with a steady beam.²

Marshall adds this note:

The light, of course, is not that shed by the approaching parousia of Jesus, heralded as it is by a period of twilight (Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 7:31; 2 Pet. 1:19). The light of the world has already dawned in the coming of

¹Raymond E. Gingrich, An Outline and Analysis of the First Epistle of John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1943), pp. 74-76.

²B. C. Westcott, The Epistles of John (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 54.

Jesus (Jn. 8:12; cf. 1:19; 3:19; 9:5; 12:35f, 46), but it shines like a beacon in the continuing darkness and will blaze out gloriously at the parousia. The light is described as "true." It is a real thing. Possibly, there is a polemical thrust here. John is rejecting the idea that there can be any other source of light¹ than that provided by Jesus and the Christian message.

The use of φῶς in this passage can be shown by darkness passing away and the light shining as referring to a spiritual illumination of an individual. Man's nature is darkened by sin. When he receives Christ as Savior, he receives light. The result is not a once and for all completed state of illumination. The unveiling of darkness sets into motion that which is to be a continual process of enlightenment. One day Christ will complete that process when we shall see Him (1 Jn. 3:1-3; 2 Cor. 3:18).

The passage emphasizing "the darkness passing away" and "the light already shining" is in reference to a saved individual who has received Christ, "the true light of this world." He is now undergoing a process of illumination whereby he is becoming more and more like his Savior. He can now understand and apply spiritual truth. Now this individual is a "child of light" (Eph. 5:8), who gives forth light (Mt. 5:16), and thus he can lead others to the Savior.

¹Marshall, "The Epistles of John," p. 130.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The usage of $\phi\omega\gamma$, as can be traced throughout this study, is seen as functioning in a dual role; first in a natural realm but also and more importantly in a metaphorical realm. In its natural realm, light is used to refer to the sun, moon, and stars and other luminous bodies (i.e. Gen. 1:15, 17; Ps. 18:29; Jn. 11:9-10; etc.). As light appears metaphorically, it has a number of uses (e.g. Isa. 10:17; 1 Jn. 1:5, as identifying God's nature; Prov. 6:23; Jn. 3:19-21, as denoting judgment; Jn. 11:9-10, etc., as referring to life and living; Jn. 8:12, 9:5, etc., as referring to the person of Jesus Christ; etc.).

In the Johannine Writings, while $\phi\omega\gamma$ is used both in a natural realm and also metaphorically, the key emphasis is found in the metaphorical usage. However, concerning the metaphorical usage, the critical application of $\phi\omega\gamma$ by John is to denote the spiritual enlightenment of man's soul.

$\phi\omega\gamma$ only occurs in the first twelve chapters of John's Gospel. These twelve chapters relate to the beginning of Christ's ministry, the accounts of His early ministry. The emphasis upon "light" and its antithesis "darkness" in these chapters is extremely important. Men by

nature walk in darkness. Jesus Christ is light and brings light to the world by revealing God's nature.

Light has properties that help us understand God's holiness and His fellowship with men. First of all, light reveals. When God's revelation to men was lost because of the blindness of the natural mind, Jesus Christ came as the Light, revealing the person of a holy God. Christ says, "no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared (revealed) him" (Jn. 1:18).¹

God has revealed Himself and draws men to Himself. But, men can only experience the light of God revealed through the person of Jesus Christ completely by believing in Jesus Christ, receiving Him into their hearts as their personal Savior.

The perception of spiritual truth is as little attainable by logical faculty or common intelligence as it is by theosophic contemplation. Spiritual regeneration is the prerequisite of spiritual illumination. Those only who are "begotten of God" have the power to "see" and "know" Divine realities. God is Light; and had human nature been animated by a normal and healthy spiritual life, the Divine illumination would have flowed in upon it uninterruptedly by all its channels of affinity with the Divine nature. And, indeed, St. John's thought is that the Light never has been, never could be, wholly withdrawn. But "the Light" shineth in the darkness and the darkness apprehended it not" (Jn. 1:5). As the original state of every man is death (3:14), so it is also blindness. And "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). The fundamental Johannine position is that the whole redemption process has its origin, not in any conscious human act, but in an antecedent activity of the Divine Life in man; and the first fruit and manifestation of this activity is the power to "see," to "believe" on Him who is the Light, to "know" God whom He reveals.²

¹ J. D. Pentecost, The Joy of Fellowship (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 23.

² Law, The Tests of Life, p. 63.

A definite conclusion to the Johannine usage of φῶς has been demonstrated. First, John's Gospel points to the need in each individual to come to God who is "Light." The means for man's coming to God is through the Person of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I John provides tests through which the believer can evaluate his lifestyle. Through these tests he observes if he truly has been born again and is now a "Son of Light."

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