



The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly. (Prov 20:27)

A candle is a meager light compared to the brilliance of the sun, yet a single candle will disperse a room full of darkness. The candle is referred to in many parts of Holy Scripture. If it were not an important object of illustration and truth, God would not have made reference to it so very often. I live in lower Alabama – the Baptist belt of the United States. The Baptists are a good people who trust in God’s Word, but they do have problems with candles. Some of my clergy brothers have admonished me for the display of the Gospel and Epistle candles on the Lord’s Table (not an altar, for that suggests a continuing sacrifice of the Lord). I explain to them the importance of graphic objects which the Lord used in teaching – vessels of wood and stone, Rose of Sharon, White Stone, Morning Star, Brazen Serpent, Lamb, whited sepulchers, salt and light, snails and spiders, etc. Then I direct their attention to the 5th verse of the 2nd chapter of Revelations: *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.* I then inform them that we in the Anglican Church still have our candles while those of others have been taken away. They are not happy with that response, but they go away without further argument. 😊

The Lord uses His candle to search out the depths of man’s soul. And what is that candle? According to the verse quoted from Proverbs 20:27, it is the *spirit of man*. The spirit of man that is not in union with the Spirit of God is an advocate of the dark things of evil, and it searches out those dark features of the soul and ignites them to evil acts. But the spirit of man, united to the Will and Spirit of God, will grow in righteousness and knowledge of God, his Maker. *10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.* (1 Cor 2:10-12) Even the darkened candle of the wicked serves to reveal that darkness to the All-Seeing Spirit of God. As good and righteous men are called to judge the things of this world, so the Spirit of God judges the unseen things of the heart. *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.* (Prov 20:5) This spirit of wicked man is like a dim light to the Lord to judge his heart and soul. *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* (Eph 2:2)

But the Candle of the Lord is the spirit of man that has become One with the

Spirit of God. It gives light along the avenues and highways of life to the traveler, and a beam of light to the lost ship rocking on a turbulent sea. That small candle of man becomes a burning and bright torch when fueled by the 'bee's wax' of the Holy Spirit. The example of the candle as the spirit of man applies equally to the Church. The Church, too, must be a revealer of light and truth. That candle in the soul of man, and in the Church, must be lit by the Holy Spirit else it remains in darkness.

Unfortunately, there are many in this world who waste away the gifts of God on worldly pursuits. They burn their candle at both ends and finish with a debilitated health and a miserable conscience. Just as God has made man, man also makes the candle. But it is the Light of God that lights the candle of a just man. The purpose of the candle is to give light. Light reveals the unseen and illumines truth to our eyes. Those whose lights are wicked shall find themselves in eternal darkness. *For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.* (Prov 24:20) He shall endure eternal darkness – *Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.* (Matt 22:13-14) But the man whose Light is the Lord shall never see that darkness: *This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.* (John 6:50) Our souls are the candle – the Holy Spirit is the true light. That Light, for the righteous, shall never go out - even in the sleep of death. Our candles dimly light the way in this world (for presently, we see through a glass darkly), but morning brings the rising of the Sun of Righteousness when the skies will be lighted with glistening splendor.

Of course, the candle of man is small and lights the way only a short space; therefore it must be carried to all places where light is needed. So must the infallible Gospel be carried in the fallible hands of man to every place that darkness reigns. Another characteristic of the candle of man is that it is made only for the darkness of this world. There is no need for a candle in the brightness of the Day Star.

I believe the candle of man is, at its fundamental essence, that conscience that God placed in his heart on the day of his conception. It stays with us all the days of our lives. To the wicked man, it is a tormenter to constantly remind him of his wickedness and reprobation. To the righteous, it is a comfort and a Guide to point the way in times of temptation and stress.

Great men of God are brighter candles than are commonly seen by the eye. Their lives and sacrifice reveal great faith, truth, and hope. Let me remind the reader of two such great men of the Reformation Church of England who lit their candles on the burning stake outside Balliol College, Oxford, as martyrs to the faith. The names of these two men whose courage would have melted steel were Bishop Hugh Latimer and Bishop Nicholas Ridley. Bishop Latimer was Bishop of Worcester and Bishop Ridley of London and Westminster. As they approached the stake in the crowded plaza, Bishop Ridley was a bit nervous and fearful; - would you not be as well? Bishop Latimer encouraged this martyr for Christ with these words: *Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.* And they certainly did light such a candle whose radiant beams lit up and exposed the dark superstitions of Rome and resulted in one of the greatest Reformation movements in all of history. This occurred on 16 October 1555.

The Candle of the Lord knows its place. It is not proud or presumptuous. We should all be the kind of candle that Bishops Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley represented. Do you wonder if they were very high and proud bishops? Well, you may be surprised to know that they were nothing of the kind. I will share two excerpts of a sermon given by Bishop Latimer before the King of England:

And now I would ask a strange question: who is the most diligentest bishop and prelate in all England that passeth all the rest in doing his office? I can tell for I know him who it is; I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearkening that I should name him. There is one that passeth all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you: it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure; ye shall never find him unoccupied; he is ever in his parish; he keepeth residence at all times; ye shall never find him out of the way, call for him when you will he is ever at home; the diligentest preacher in all the realm; he is ever at his plough; no lording nor loitering can hinder him; he is ever applying his business, ye shall never find him idle, I warrant you. And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. He is ready as he can be wished for to set forth his plough; to devise as many ways as can be to deface and obscure God's glory...O that our prelates would be as diligent to sow the corn of good doctrine as Satan is to sow cockle and darnel. (*Sermon on the Plough*, 29 January 1548. (G. E. Corrie (ed.), *Sermons by Hugh Latimer, sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555* (Cambridge University Press, 1844), pp. 70-1.)

Here is another that directs its fire upon the proud and superficial preacher who has forgotten his role as servant to the people and not master, preferring proud titles and bows from his parishioners:

For preaching of the Gospel is one of God's plough-works, and the preacher is one of God's ploughmen.

Be not offended with my similitude, in that I compare preaching to the labor and work of ploughing, and the preacher to a ploughman: ye may not be offended with this my similitude, though I have been unjustly slandered by some persons for such things..... But as preachers must be wary and circumspect, that they give not any just occasion to be slandered and ill-spoken of by the hearers, so the auditors must not be offended without cause. For heaven is in the Gospel likened unto a mustard-seed: it is compared also to a piece of leaven; and Christ saith, that at the last day he will come like a thief; and what dishonor is this to God? Or what derogation is this to heaven? You should not, then, I say, be offended with my similitude, because I liken preaching to a ploughman's labor, and a prelate to a ploughman. But now you will ask me, whom I call a prelate? A prelate is that man, whatsoever he is, that has a flock to be taught by him; whosoever has any spiritual charge in the faithful congregation, and whosoever he is that has a cure of souls. (ibid)

This man was, indeed, a CANDLE OF THE LORD, and the fires of his burning are yet lighting the sinking fires of distant dunes and pasturelands.

The candle is not torch. It does not purport to be. Neither is the preacher - or Christian - the Gospel, but rather the bearer of it to his flock as a servant bears the tray to the table of his patrons. Remember the words of Christ: ***If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*** (Mark 9:35) Jesus, too, came ministering (serving, and not to be served [ministered] to). Shall we be any different with our testimonies and candles of light?