33 "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. 34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

This is a passage that many people who have grown up in the church will remember from elementary Sunday school. Unlike many of Jesus’ parables it seems to be incredibly clear cut and easy to understand. Verse 33 starts out with the obvious. Of course, you do not put a lamp under a bowl. That would be just plain silly. It would not do any good for anyone that way. No, when you have a lamp, you put it on your end table so that it casts light upon all in the room.

This is a thinly veiled allusion to Jesus Christ. When one lights the “lamp” they are, in essence, hearing Christ’s message. When they take his message to heart and obey his teachings they are putting their lamp on a stand (Evans, 188). In relation to verses leading up to this passage, Jesus is greater than Jonah and Solomon, and yet people recognized their “lights” and put them on “tables” so they would be seen and the light could be gleaned from them. Solomon’s wisdom was great and a gift of God and people came from miles around to listen to his wisdom. Jonah’s message to the Ninevites was recognized as Holy and people repented and turned to God (Keck, 244). Yet, Christ’s light was brighter than both of theirs combined, and yet people did not want it to be displayed or heeded.

Verse 34 suddenly takes a turn and is no longer talking about the same thing as verse 33. The focus is now the lamps of our bodies, our eyes. Because of modern science and biology, we know that our ability to see something rests heavily on light from the sun or other...
artificial light. However, there is Greco-Roman, as well as Jewish Literature explaining that the eye emits light and that sight is possible because of the combination of inner light and outer light (Keck, 244). This puts a lot of pressure on the eyes. If the eyes fail to do what they are assigned to do—to light things up so that we can see—the body is in danger of falling over everything!

Going further into the depths of this verse, we realize that the eyes are reflecting the light of an individual’s morality and spirituality. When an individual is willing to hear and obey Jesus, they are full of hope and truth; when they are not willing to listen to the Lord, they are full of ignorance of the true saving grace (Evans, 188). The word translated as bad is literally evil in Greek—when you live an evil life, you are full of evilness.

In my studies, the thought that perked the most interest for me was that it says “when your eyes are good, your whole body full of light. But when your eyes are bad, your body is full of darkness.” The word whole is omitted (Holland, 658). Does that mean that if your “eyes” are bad or you are morally corrupt, your whole body is not full of evil? You just have a lot of evil in you…meaning that you could potentially have some good in you? Something to ponder…

Verse 35 is an admonition or a challenge to be sure that your insides are lit. One should examine who they are and what they value and decide which side of the line they will be on. Once you are aware of yourself you cannot go back to the being the same. Once you know that what you are doing is wrong, to continue doing so is despicable, but if you change what you are doing you can become Holy and good (Evans, 188).

The end of this passage summarizes the rest and brings it together. At its core it is saying that if your body is light it will shine. The light that is in you will fill your entire body. It harkens back to verse 33 and reestablishes that a lamp not only shines on you, but it is a beacon that shines on others as well. We should take this to heart and allow ourselves to shine. We sing that
precious children’s song, “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine hide it under a
bush, OH NO! I’m going to let it shine!” and are reminded that we are called to be lights in the
world.

Works Consulted

Grade: B—