

The Light of Darkness

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

Psalms 139:11-12 ESV

In Psalm 139, David paints a beautiful picture of God's unsurpassed knowledge and understanding through meditations on the human experience, our innermost being, and our creation and dependence on God's provision. In verses 11-12 (above), David is clearly expressing how there is nothing hidden from the vision of God and David uses our common physical experience of the contrast between darkness and light to illuminate (no pun intended) how God's "vision" is different from ours and his power and provision extend beyond our limited understanding. While David has in mind a very poetic view and spiritual sense of light and darkness, I can't let an obvious physics metaphor to go waste, so I probed a bit into just how light "the darkness" is.

As you probably know, there is more "light" in the universe than what we can see with our eyes, because we have limitations in our physical ability to receive and process light. Everything on the electromagnetic spectrum¹ is, at the fundamental level, made of photons and is therefore light, whether we can see it with our eyes or not. Scientists and engineers can make cameras or other types of detectors to "see" much of this other light. For example, common thermal cameras record the infrared light emitted by warm objects that shine like a lightbulb emitting light, but light that is invisible to our eyes (see Figure 1).

But, you say, how much light is there in the darkest, remotest parts of the universe? I'm glad you asked! It turns out that there are approximately 400 million photons per cubic meter in even the most remote parts of the known universe.² This light is in the microwave region of the electromagnetic spectrum, but still detectable by very sensitive instruments. On the surface of the Earth there are orders of magnitude more photons flying around us all the time from the warmth of our surroundings, even in the darkest night. **Even the darkness is not dark to our all-seeing God!**

The result for David in Psalm 139 is a fervent plea to our all-wise, all-knowing, and all-loving God to seek out David's innermost being and purify him and lead him in "the way everlasting!" (v.24). Of course, we know this way to be The Way, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have purity and are able to approach a God who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). It is my prayer that God continue to do his wise work in each of us in greater measure, and in all our Berean brothers and sisters, to the end that we rejoice in God's sovereign care over all creation, past, present, and future, and especially his beloved children.

Abiding in The Light,
Pastor Aaron



Figure 1: Photo of the author in the infrared spectrum. Brighter is warmer. Note the cool glasses and beard 😊.

¹ A cool retro poster of the EM spectrum: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/llnl/9403051123/sizes/h/>

² See answer 1 from this page: <https://www.studocu.com/en-gb/document/university-college-london/physics-of-the-universe/phas1102-a4-phas-1102-physics-of-the-universe-problem-sheet-4-solutions-ucl/5919109>