

One morning as I journeyed through the rugged desert terrain surrounding the Dead Sea, I came across a man seated with his back to the sun, looking over at the cliffs on the other side of one particular valley.

I asked him how he was doing, and he told me he was fine - he was just enjoying watching the sunrise. When I mentioned that his back was to the sun, he said, "It is too bright to look straight into the sun, but the colors reflected in the layers of rock opposite it are absolutely wonderful to view and to contemplate. The images change like a variable rainbow as the sun rises and the shadows sink. I can see colors that are hidden in the brightness of the sun that would overwhelm me if I tried to look straight on."

My opinion of the man had quickly reversed, and I now looked at him with greater respect. I myself often watched the colorful effect of a sunrise on clouds in east, but had never thought about positioning myself to look the other way.

Then a greater understanding came to me, as I thought about the parallel in this situation to the overwhelming glory of God. We can't sense Him directly, as Elijah found when God reduced His "appearance" from a mountain-toppling wind to a quiet whisper¹. Jesus was the radiance of God's glory, and He perfectly represented the Goodness of God², but a direct view of God is simply too bright for us. Peter, James, and John caught a glimpse of that when for an instant, the face of Christ flashed as bright as lightning³.

But He doesn't expect us to look directly into his glory, as though we were looking into the sun. He only expects us to see the world through His light⁴.

*"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen:
not only because I see it,
but because by it I see everything else."*

C.S. Lewis

1. 1 Kings 19:11-13
2. Hebrews 1:3
3. Luke 9:29
4. John 8:12

Spurring this story was watching the photographer at work who set up his camera facing west; when he was asked what he was doing, he said that he was going to take sequence shots of the sunrise. When it was pointed out to him that the sun rose in the east, he explained that he was going to see the structures of the facility light up as the sun rose.

Overwhelming brightness looking straight at sun? In the general direction, you can see the colors of the nearby clouds.

Elijah and the whisper; we can't take in His "image" – it is simply too bright
Transfiguration

No sun... but God is light; Jesus is the light of the world
He doesn't expect us to only look into the powerful beam (someone shining a flashlight in your eyes)

Luke 9:29; As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

Hebrews 1:3; The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.