

The Importance of Seeing as God Sees

Probably the most famous selection of a king in the whole Bible appears in 1 Samuel 16. There, God gives Samuel the job of finding a replacement for Saul, a man who stood head and shoulders above everyone else but was a midget in spiritual terms. God guides Samuel to the household of Jesse and his multitude of sons. Samuel sees the first, a strapping lad named Eliab, and makes the same mistake as with Saul. He assumes that outward impressiveness indicates inward fitness to rule.

We see God's reaction to this in 1 Samuel 16:7. Even though Eliab looked the part, his character didn't measure up to his height. Instead, God was looking for someone with the right heart.

Today, it's awfully easy for us to be misled by appearances too. The average CEO is nearly three inches taller than the average man, and that's not because the air up there helps them think better! Similarly, in our spiritual lives, we are often faced with choices that look appealing at first glance but can't stand up to deeper scrutiny. We can't afford to be taken in by how things seem. This evening, then, let's consider the importance of seeing as God sees.

First, learning to see properly will help us SEE THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL. Consider the sad situation that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. Ever since His time on earth, the light of Christ has been shining in the darkness. However, not everybody who lives in darkness is able to see the light. Instead, Satan, who is the god of this world, blinds their minds so that they don't see the truth of the gospel and obey it.

This is a verse that helps me a lot with the puzzling behavior of the people in the world around us. I try to be honest with the Scriptures. I try to admit when something isn't spelled out in black and white, when you have to reason to it instead. However, baptism isn't like that. There are multiple passages that say that you have to be baptized to have your sins forgiven, clear as clear can be.

However, most people in this country who claim to be Christians deny the plain meaning of those passages. They replace baptism, which is clearly in the Bible, with the sinner's prayer, which is not. How can that be??? I think Paul gives us the answer right here. Their minds have been blinded by the devil so that they can't see the truth.

This doesn't require some form of Satanic brainwashing. Instead, the devil leads them astray with family tradition, hundreds of years of false teaching, and the fear of the unknown. Those things keep the truth from reaching their hearts, and they can keep the truth from our hearts too. We need to be determined to study the Scriptures and follow wherever they lead. If we put anything else before the truth, the devil will use that to lead us astray as well.

Second, seeing as God sees will lead us to UNDERSTAND SPIRITUAL THINGS. Look at Paul's discussion of this in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16. In this text, Paul tells us that there are two mindsets when it comes to the Scriptures. The first is the mindset of the natural man. He thinks that the things of the spirit are foolishness and can't understand them. The second is the mindset of the spiritual man. He understands the things of the spirit, develops the mind of Christ, and insulates himself from judgment.

The natural way of thinking is obvious when we consider the people of the world around us. They are concerned with nothing more than earthly pleasure and clearly think like natural men. However, this same natural mindset can appear even in those who are nominally Christians.

These are the people who have the same Bible, look at the same passages, but can't seem to get it. The problem is that rather than being animated by the will of God, they are animated by the desire of the flesh. They want to do what they want to do, and they want to find a way to make the Bible say what they want it to say.

People like this don't ask, "How much of my life can I give to the Lord?" They ask, "How much of my life can I keep for myself?" Like me with the IRS, they are determined to give only what they are required to and not a penny more. That might be appropriate when it comes to taxes, but it's a miserable return to the Lord who gave everything for us. Rather than looking for justifications for why some gray-area behavior is actually OK, let's ask instead what we can do to best glorify God.

Third, once we see as God sees, WE CAN REMOVE SIN. Look at the Lord's discussion in Matthew 7:3-5. This, of course, comes right on the heels of the famous do-not-judge passage. Here, though, the Lord reveals that the problem isn't with judging per se. It's with the people who are doing the judging. These self-appointed judges have worse problems with sin than the people they're trying to condemn!

Jesus says that once we deal with the problem of sin in our own lives, we'll be able to see clearly enough to help others with their spiritual struggles. However, I think that the importance of clear vision actually starts even earlier. In order to see others clearly, we have to see ourselves clearly.

Romans 2 tells us that there is no partiality with God. God sees everyone as they truly are. However, every single one of us struggles with partiality to ourselves. Every one of us is wonderful at spotting the sin in somebody else, but we're usually much more unwilling to see the sin in our own lives.

Let me give you an example. For all of you husbands and wives, when you get into it with your spouse, how many of you have an easy time admitting your bad behavior? Sure, it's easy to identify when our spouse says something they shouldn't, or when they got angry about something that they shouldn't have, but we don't have that

clarity of vision about ourselves. Most of the time, we stomp away from that marital argument 100 percent convinced that we are 100 percent right, and then, only after we've cooled down, will we grudgingly admit that we might have behaved a teeny bit badly ourselves. Every one of us, then, can improve in self-honesty, in being truthful to ourselves about how God sees us right now. Once we learn to be honest about our own sin, we can help others with theirs.

Fourth, when we see our lives through the eyes of heaven, WE USE OUR TIME WISELY. Here, let's read together from Ephesians 5:15-16. If we were to capture the first part of v. 15 in an English idiom, we'd say, "Watch your step." That's the idea here. We can be foolish people who blunder through life and trip over all sorts of spiritual problems, or we can be wise, careful people who see the dangers and place our feet so as to avoid them.

Paul goes on to tell us that if we watch our step, one of the things that will happen is that we will make good use of our time despite living in an evil time. In other words, when we learn to see as God sees, one of the dangers we will avoid is distraction. Worldly people don't just trip over sin. They trip over worldly things that take their attention away from seeking God. The devil doesn't really care what our number-one priority is, just so long as that priority isn't God. If we make our lives about our jobs, or about our families, or about our hobbies, we will be just as lost as the people who make their lives about sexual immorality or drunkenness.

Instead, we must remember that every one of us has a limited amount of time left in our lives, and we need to be spending that time on what is most important. This doesn't mean that we need to quit our jobs and spend our days staring up into the sky waiting for Jesus to come back. After all, the Scriptures tell us in numerous places that Christians who work hard and provide for themselves glorify God. However, it does mean that we don't let anything else in our lives come before the kingdom and the proclamation of the gospel. That way when we reach the end of our lives, we can do so knowing that we have used those lives wisely, on what was truly important.

Finally, when we see as God sees, WE DON'T LOSE HEART. Paul explores this idea in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. None of us can see the spiritual, but God can. None of us can see the eternal, but God can. When we learn to see from Him, we will look to the unseen too.

This is particularly important when the things that we can see on earth aren't going too well. We all know that bad things happen to good people. We all know that every Christian will suffer in this life. However, even when our outward man is perishing, we can remember that our inward man is being renewed by God every day.

This matters to all of us, but I think it especially matters for older Christians. It's hard to feel your body growing more frail, and it's even harder to see the same

deterioration in your spouse. Nonetheless, if we keep our eyes fixed on the eternal, we have every reason not to lose heart. Yes, this life is drawing to its close for all of us, but God will bless us with a glorious, spiritual body that will never grow old. Because of that, we can face each day with joy, no matter what our physical condition may be.

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