

Spiritual Vision

“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.”

—II Corinthians 4:18

THE WORDS OF OUR

opening text, at first, appear to be a paradox. Many would say that you cannot see an invisible thing, and the fact that it is invisible proves that it cannot be seen. Yet here,

the Apostle Paul goes on in the same verse to state that “the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Human beings have five senses which convey certain signals to their mind. They are touch, smell, taste, hearing and sight. With the sense of touch we can tell whether something is hard or soft, smooth or rough. By the senses of smell and taste we can determine whether a thing is pleasant or obnoxious, sweet or bitter. With our hearing we are aware of various sounds. By sight, various stimuli are impressed upon the optic nerve, which is then communicated to the brain, resulting in an image.

Christians, however, have an ultra-sharpened sense of sight by which they may see or discern things which are invisible to the natural eye. This is not at all a natural sense, but is an inner sight or discernment, something we might refer to as “spiritual vision.” As a follower of Christ, the

things we perceive by our spiritual vision are oftentimes in conflict with those that are impressed upon our natural mind. Paul writes how there is a constant warfare between these two: “The un-spiritual man rejects these truths of the Spirit of God; to him they are sheer folly, he cannot understand them. And the reason is, that they must be read with the spiritual eye.”—I Cor. 2:14, *James Moffatt Translation*

NO SIGHT WITHOUT LIGHT

Before anyone can see a natural object, there must be light reflecting upon it. Within a room, if the lights are turned off and window shades all closed, we likely would not be able to see anything. Objects inside the room would still be there, just as before, but because there is no light to show them to our vision, we would not see them. Additionally, if while we are looking at an object, a glare of light shines into our eyes stronger than the light that is being reflected from the object, we would no longer be able to see that object. For example, when driving an automobile, light shining from our vehicle’s headlights makes visible the road before us. However, if a strong light from the headlights of an oncoming car shines into our eyes, it may temporarily blind us, thus preventing us from seeing the road ahead.

It is similar with spiritual vision. Spiritual vision needs proper light—that which comes from the Word of God, the Bible. As the psalmist writes, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps. 119:105) Such light reveals spiritual things to the Christian’s mind.

VISION FROM GOD'S VIEWPOINT

Spiritual vision is seeing things as God sees them. He sees everything in every place. (Ps. 139:1-10; Prov. 15:3; Jer. 23:24,25; Heb. 4:13) Nothing can obstruct his vision. All the perplexing problems of mankind relative to their eternal destiny are transparent to him, because he knows "the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." (Isa. 46:9,10) Christians who begin to develop spiritual vision start to see things from the divine viewpoint. They cannot yet see all that God can see, but they can see much that is beyond mere human perception.

Sunlight is a portion of the electromagnetic radiation given off by the sun. The three relevant bands or ranges along the solar radiation spectrum are ultraviolet, visible and infrared. Man's natural vision is limited to the visible light range, a relatively narrow range of wavelengths. However, there are other things taking place around us all the time which we do not see with our natural eyes. Wavelengths shorter than the color violet, such as ultraviolet light, x-rays, and gamma rays cannot be seen by natural human vision. Similarly, wavelengths longer than the visible color red, such as infrared, satellite, wireless, radio, and MRI rays also cannot be seen by natural human vision. Although these invisible wavelengths are not seen with the human eye, we know they exist because of the effects which they produce.

Even within the visible light range, there are things which our human eye cannot take in. High-speed cameras can record hundreds of images a second. Afterwards, when the recording is played

at a slower speed, we can see things which we never could have seen otherwise. Our natural sight is also limited to objects that are relatively near to us. Objects located far away can only be seen clearly with an aid, such as a set of binoculars or a telescope. Thus, even our natural, unaided human vision is limited by wavelengths, velocity, and distance.

Spiritual vision goes beyond all human limitations. It can see things decades, centuries, or even thousands of years ahead of their occurrence. This is the kind of vision which the prophets of the Old Testament were given through God's Holy Spirit. (II Pet. 1:21) Through their writings we too can see into the future. We obtain such spiritual vision only through the Word of God. Before we can see the things which God has revealed in his Word, we must be in harmony with him. This spiritual vision comes to us only through faith.

In our opening verse Paul gives the reason why we should "look not at [Greek: not take aim at] the things which are seen," because "the things which are seen are temporal [Greek: temporary]." Examples of temporary things include our job, the place where we live, money, popularity with others, honors, reputation, material belongings, and the like.

The apostle tells us, rather, to look at, that is aim for, the "things which are not seen," because they are "eternal [Greek: perpetual]." The perpetual things which we are to aim for are "eternal life" and "eternal glory."—Rom. 2:7; I Tim. 6:12; Titus 3:7; I John 2:25; I Pet. 5:10

FAITH AND SPIRITUAL VISION

Faith and spiritual vision work hand in hand. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the

conviction of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1, *New American Standard Bible*) In this verse we notice that to “look at” or “aim for” things not seen requires faith. Similarly, fully developed faith requires a keen perception of spiritual things. Those with spiritual vision have faith in things which they cannot see literally, because God’s Word reveals them and consequently, they become truth.

Why is this the case? It is because the promises given by God are sure. Those developing such spiritual vision are sufficiently acquainted with his Word of Truth to know that he is reliable. They understand that anything which he has said is factual, because “it is impossible for God to lie.”—Ps. 119:151,160; Heb. 6:18

VISION OF THE PROPHETS

Abraham possessed spiritual vision in a measure, though he did not have it to the degree which is possible now for the followers of Christ. God said to Abraham: “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3; 28:14) Jesus said: “Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” (John 8:56) Abraham did not see God’s plan as clearly as we can at the present time, but he saw enough of it and with the eye of faith, he rejoiced and was glad.

Moses had spiritual vision. By faith in God, Moses “preferred being mistreated with God’s people to enjoying the pleasures of sin for a short time. ... By faith he left Egypt, without being afraid of the king’s anger, and he persevered because he saw the one who is invisible.” (Heb. 11:25,27, *International Standard Version*) We believe this refers to the time

just prior to the tenth and final plague, when Moses went to Pharaoh with God's authority, to demand that the Hebrews be released from Egyptian bondage. —Exod. 10:28,29

Elisha also had a spiritual vision. When the king of Aram, or Syria, went to war against Israel, he told his advisors to build an encampment in a certain location. However, God informed Elisha about it and he in turn warned the king of Israel. Consequently, Israel was able to thwart the plans of the king of Aram. This angered the king, and he called in his advisors, and asked them, "Will you please tell me which of us has joined the king of Israel?" One of the king's servants answered, "Elisha the prophet ... tells the king of Israel what you talk about in your bedroom!" The king then sent an elite force at night to surround the city where Elisha was, in order to capture him. The next morning Elisha's servant arose and when he saw the city surrounded by these elite forces, he cried out to the prophet saying: "Oh no! Master! What will we do!?"—II Kings 6:8-15, *ISV*

Elisha was not afraid. He had spiritual vision and knew of things which his servant could not understand or see. Elisha replied to his servant, "Stop being afraid, because there are more with us than with them!" Then Elisha prayed that God would open his servant's eyes that he might see. God enabled Elisha's servant to see a "mountain, filled with horses and fiery chariots surrounding Elisha," angelic hosts of the Lord. (II Kings 6:16,17, *ISV*) Elisha's servant saw with natural vision what Elisha saw with spiritual vision. So too, by faith, we can see the heavenly host round

about us, because God has said they are there.—
Ps. 34:7

It is important that every Christian should have their eyes of understanding opened, enlightened, that they may see by faith and “may know what is the hope of his calling,” and the “riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” (Eph. 1:18,19) During the present Gospel Age, the Lord does not necessarily open our natural eyes to see all the wonderful provisions he has made for us, including his power for our protection. Instead, he gives us a still better knowledge of the subject through his Word of grace and truth, so that we learn to “walk by faith, not by sight,” and to see the angels of the Lord encamped around without any miracle being performed upon our natural sight. (II Cor. 5:7) None of us is strong enough to pass through the battle of Christian warfare without such assistances as that which God has provided, and which faith beholds, accepts, lays hold of, rests upon, and is strengthened thereby.

God’s power surrounds all his consecrated people in an unlimited measure and is exercised by spirit beings, entirely invisible to men. The important thing is that under all conditions, omnipotent power stands behind and completely surrounds those who are his. (Heb. 13:5) Therefore, whatever may occur in their experiences will be only by God’s foreknowledge and permission. The promise to these is that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—
Rom. 8:28

JESUS' VISION

Although God's servants of the Old Testament had, because of their great faith, a degree of spiritual vision, the Christian's spiritual sight can go even beyond theirs. This is testified to for the first time in the case of our Lord Jesus. Jesus came to Jordan to be baptized in water by John the Baptist, symbolizing the full consecration to God which he had made of his life, even unto death. When Jesus came up out of the water, "the heavens were opened unto him," indicating Jesus now had spiritual vision to a degree which he had never possessed during the preceding thirty years in which lived at Nazareth.—Matt. 3:13-17

What did this spiritual vision make known to Jesus? It revealed what the Heavenly Father had sent him to do during the next three and a half years—to willingly fulfill all the prophecies concerning him which had been recorded during Old Testament times, including that he would be betrayed and that he would be "hated ... without a cause." (Matt. 26:54-56; John 13:18; 15:25) After his resurrection, Jesus explained to two of the disciples, who were walking on the road to Emmaus, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets ... in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27) That was the spiritual vision given to Jesus.

It is similarly true with all those who follow in Jesus' footsteps. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (II Cor. 5:17) That is the beginning of spiritual vision. It means that the Christian then begins *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) to see things differently, from God's standpoint, trusting in our lovingly Heavenly Father's power and providence.

An example of such a trust was shown when Jesus was brought before Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer." Then Pilate said to Jesus, "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."—John 19:9-11

In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul gives a wonderful description of spiritual vision as it came to him. He writes, "Whatever things were assets to me, these I now consider a loss for the sake of the Messiah." Paul could say this because his vision had become spiritual, and he could see things that he had never before imagined. Those earthly things which previously had been assets to him, he now considered as loss and a detriment, having gained the greater spiritual vision.—Phil. 3:7,8, *ISV*

SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL VISION

Spiritual vision is the impression made on the new mind. It comes through the revelation of God's Word. It is disclosed by the Heavenly Father to those who make a full consecration of their all to him and who are then begotten with his Holy Spirit. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep

things of God.” (I Cor. 2:9,10) Such vision is only for those who are spiritually minded. The natural mind cannot see these things, “because they are spiritually discerned.”—vs. 14

While spiritual vision is very real to us, yet to the naturally minded outsider it seems like “foolishness.” (I Cor. 1:18; 2:14) This is because they cannot appreciate God’s Word as we do. Our spiritual vision and our faith take hold of these things and they become realities in our life. For example, God’s “exceeding great and precious promises” inspire the faithful Christian’s life. (II Pet. 1:4) When things are going contrary to what would seem good and prudent to the natural mind, by faith, the child of God is able to see a blessed outcome, and with the eye of faith say: “I know that difficult tests are necessary for me. I am not surprised.” The Apostle Peter admonishes along this line, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:12,13

Such assurances are a part of our spiritual vision. They tell us the meaning of the trials that come to us. Reasoning merely naturally, Christians would be discouraged; however, their spiritual vision shows to them the sustaining promises of God. They realize that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (II Cor. 4:17) Thus, God shows us things which no mortal eye has seen or can see. Revelation 14:1-3 portrays a scene in

which 144,000 are standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, singing “a new song” that “no man” could sing except them. This is a symbolic expression which refers to the blessings of this class, all of which are due to their spiritual vision.

NOW WE SEE IMPERFECTLY

Paul writes, “For now we see through a glass, darkly.” (I Cor. 13:12) Though we have received spiritual vision, our vision is not yet perfect, and some things are still dark. We do not now see everything in full light, because we are still in the flesh; and its limitations hamper perfect clarity of spiritual perception. When Paul says, “we see through a glass, darkly,” he does not refer to natural men or natural vision, but to the consecrated followers of Christ. Indeed, the natural man cannot see spiritual things at all, not even “darkly.” Paul refers to the fact that our spiritual vision is marred by our weak flesh, which prevents us from seeing things perfectly. Despite all our efforts to subdue our natural inclinations, fleshly tendencies will assert themselves at times because we were born in sin and are imperfect.—Ps. 51:5; Rom. 7:14-24

Our loving Heavenly Father “knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” (Ps. 103:14) Nevertheless, he permits us to see things with the eye of faith, even if our flesh is continually warring against this spiritual sight that he gave us. This tends to warp our vision, so that we cannot hope to see perfectly, until our resurrection “change” occurs. *Moffatt* translates I Corinthians 13:12 as follows: “At present we only see the baffling reflections in a mirror.” What we have seen, however,

even though imperfectly, makes us long for the time when we shall see “face to face.”

Jesus saw spiritual things perfectly because he had no imperfect flesh to contend with. Though now we see “darkly,” through the veil of imperfection, nevertheless we are glad for such spiritual vision which God has granted to us at the present time.

PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

It is this spiritual vision that has guided the true followers of Christ throughout the Gospel Age. Jesus said to his disciples that these would comprise but a “little flock,” because so few would develop spiritual vision. (Luke 12:32) Natural vision, or human mindedness, sees only obstacles in following Christ; however, spiritual vision sees Jesus always leading the way. When our present life is viewed from the standpoint of the Holy Spirit, as presented in the Scriptures, it is seen to be a schooling season, a preparation for a future life and purpose, for all those who see that opportunity and respond to the heavenly calling.

While the Word of God and the Holy Spirit of God restrain our ambitions for earthly riches and assure us that the “love of money is the root of all evil,” they also guard us from the opposite extreme of slothfulness or laziness. (I Tim. 6:10) We are instructed that each should “provide things honest in the sight of all men” and especially the necessities of his own household. We are further exhorted to be “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”—Rom. 12:17,11

Those who have the Holy Spirit are guarded against the folly of those who spend their present

life with Bunyan's "muck-rake," gathering to themselves earthly treasures of no real worth. They are also protected against the unsoundness of laziness, and instead are exhorted to be energetic in all good services and deeds, and that, "whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."—Col. 3:23

The spirit of "a sound mind" recognizes in the present life opportunities for the attainment of riches of character, riches of grace and the ability to "lay up ... treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6:20) Spiritual vision assists us to live wisely in the present, while keeping in mind and preparing for the future, and envisioning our heavenly goal. Trials, difficulties, and adversities of life, if rightly accepted as lessons, are blessings in disguise and will result in glory in the life to come. Such are the eternal benefits, joys and privileges resulting from spiritual vision! ■