

Lack of Spiritual Vision

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment and the need for humility and self-reflection in order to grow spiritually.

Scripture: Proverbs 20:12, Matthew 7:3, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 John 2:11

Topics: "Spiritual Blindness", "Discernment"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the spiritual blindness caused by carnality, which hinders believers from seeing their own sins, heart conditions, and the world's true state. He emphasizes that only God sees all things clearly, and humans are naturally blind to spiritual truths. Baldwin warns against rushing into the impossible task of becoming omniscient and highlights the importance of spiritual insight, reasoning powers, and discerning the fitness of things in gaining spiritual vision.

Transcript

Again, we would state that with the most keen-sighted saints there still lingers such a measure of inability to see that at times it becomes very noticeable. That is, while they see some things clearly, other things they fail to see.

There is a dimness of vision which comes from the presence of the carnal mind. Carnality is blinding. Our first parents put on leaf aprons and thought they were covered, they skulked among the trees of the garden and flattered themselves that they were hidden. Ever since that day men have been carnally blind to the real facts of the glaring visibility of their sins, as well as blind to their own heart conditions and the condition of the world around them. Besides all this they do not know God and are blind to the fact that they are led captive by the devil at his will.

Carnality is the owl atheism that closes its blue-fringed eyelids tight, and, flying athwart the glorious sun in heaven, hoots, "Where is it?"

Carnality is a horse with blinders which can see nothing but its own path, self-sufficient, filled with its own ways.

Carnality is a bat that delights in the darkness, and covers with its demon wings every good thing.

Carnality is a mole that burrows amid the clay of earth, feeds on its filth and hates the light of day.

Nothing good can be said of carnality. It is evil, only evil and always evil! When this hateful thing is under consideration, we cry,

"Death, and only death for him,

Without pity, limb from limb,

Hew him with the Spirit's mighty, flaming sword."

But in our zeal to escape carnality we should not rush men into an impossible task of endeavoring to become omniscient. Only God sees all. Perhaps angels see enough that they never mistake, but men are so blind naturally that they never will, in this life, get beyond mistakes in spiritual vision. There are various reasons for this lack of vision -- perhaps we should not say blindness.

The world does not believe in the Spirit, from the fact that it does not see Him. Christians have a spiritual vision of Jesus.

Men are materialists. In proportion as they learn to look beyond the material and are governed by the spiritual, in that proportion they become spiritually minded. Since men live in material bodies, speak with material tongues, hear with material ears, feel with material hands and see with material eyes, it stands to reason that they to some extent judge, weigh, and draw conclusions from the material point of view. But this view may be wrong, and while the soul may discover this error it is entirely possible that it may not.

A worshiper shouts the praises of God. One person says, "That shout is surely of God"; another says, "I can not see any God in it." Both of these persons who expressed their opinions were good men, but one was surely mistaken, and this mistake was doubtless caused by a lack of spiritual insight.

An evangelist preaches. One says that that preacher is not of God, another man declares he was overwhelmed with a sense of the divine presence. Some one has mistaken the preacher. Either the first man has misjudged because he did not feel any special blessing on his own soul or did not discern his ideal of power, or it may be the second man is mistaken in ascribing to the preacher a blessing which originated in his own soul. The first man may have judged by the sight of his eyes. One thing is sure, infallibility of spiritual sight is not a necessary accompaniment of holiness of heart.

Then this lack of spiritual vision may be caused by errors in education. It is a noted fact that some very spiritual people have held some very erroneous doctrines. We need only to cite the reader to the Catholicism of Madam Guyon and Fenelon, the mystical tendencies of George Fox, which caused him to reject all ordinances, or the asceticism of Origen, Tertullian and hundreds of others.

One of the most spiritual of New Testament commentators is Pasquier Quesnel, a Jansenist Catholic. In spite of the occasional Roman Catholic errors of his doctrine he was so spiritual that he drew down upon himself the anathemas of the pope, and that impostor condemned the writings of Quesnel in a bull in which were cited one hundred and one so-called errors. Quesnel died in exile. Concerning this seeming contradiction, in the introduction to Quesnel's "Reflections on the Gospels," Daniel Wilson says:

And when we see the eminent, the almost unparalleled attainments in the spiritual life, of such men as Pascal, Nicole, Quesnel -- when we see their love to God, their separation from the vanities of the world, their holy communion of prayer, their sense of the unutterable evil of sin -- their apprehension of the divine grace, as the source of all good -- their simple, fervent, self-denying love of Christ -- their compassion and

zeal for the souls of their fellow-creatures; we must acknowledge that intellectual errors are less valid to overthrow than moral and affectionate emotions of the soul are powerful to sustain the spiritual life. The Christian lives by love, not by doctrine. If there be light enough in the understanding to lead to an acquaintance with ourselves and with Jesus Christ, our attainments will go on in proportion to our holy affections, our fervent prayers, our measure of the Holy Spirit, our self-abasement and our union with Christ, the Head of all influence and grace.

Again, a lack of spiritual vision may be caused by a lack of reasoning powers. It is not necessary that men possess gigantic reasoning powers to be wholly sanctified. They must know enough to recognize God and their own spiritual duties, but beyond this they may know very little. Most people live by impulse, not by reason. Deficient reasoning powers may be assisted or quickened by the incoming of holiness, and while they may, yet they doubtless will not be made strong. The man who lived by impulse before his conversion will generally do the same afterward; that is his mental make-up and he can not change it. We all know that a conclusion formed by impulse is not as reliable as one formed by good, normal reasoning, and a conclusion concerning spiritual matters formed by impulse is not as dependable as one which will bear the scrutiny of intelligent investigation.

To be sure there is such a thing as divine impulse, or being moved by the Holy Ghost, and we would be the last to disparage it, but God has warned us not to believe every spirit, and has told us to put each to the test. Here we note that there is such a thing as a lack of the power of spiritual discernment which will allow some on the spur of the moment, or because of strong appeal, to form wrong conclusions of duty. Infallible understanding of one's whole duty is not an absolute essential to holiness of heart, neither does strong spiritual vision prove that the heart is clean.

Finally, lack of spiritual vision may be caused by a lack in the faculty which discerns the fitness of things. Neither is this faculty infallible. It is barely possible that some who have been so fortunate as to sit on the stationing committee have realized their own lack of a sense of fitness in stationing the preachers, or if they have failed to see it themselves, others have seen it for them. Stationing committees are not infallible. It is possible that a preacher, a holy man, will reprove when he should comfort, or comfort when he should reprove; he might preach holiness when justification is needed, or talk when he should be praying. Preachers are not infallible. A layman might stay at home when he should go to meeting, or withhold when he should give, or possibly he might give when he should withhold. Laymen are not infallible. With all of us there lingers a surprising lack of fitness. If the reader should think himself exempt, this very fact proves his lack of self-discernment. The old heathen said, "Know thyself," but while the Christian approaches the ideal, yet even he has not thoroughly mastered his subject

This blindness is often manifested in a lack of ability to see one's own faults and a persistency in seeing the faults of others. We will never forget the picture in an old reader: A tall, stoop-shouldered man is walking along the path, behind him is a little hunchback pointing at the tall man's stoop shoulders and grinning. We often think of this picture when we see holiness (?) professors perfectly unconscious of their own faults and always ready to see the faults of others. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

Our eyes are not set in our heads for introspection but for extraspection. Until God opens our eyes we see others and not ourselves. Possibly with all of us there still remain some things about ourselves to learn.

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