

Eye—Window to the Soul

Matthew 6:22-24

Dear Friends,

In our study lesson for this week, Jesus reminds us; our mental and spiritual "Focus" is similar to our natural vision. You can only truly focus on one thing at a time. The moment we choose to look at any particular object we also choose not to look at any other. We fail to grasp that our spiritual "Focus" is the same. Choose to look at Jesus and His teachings, and all the fluff and stuff of this world fades in importance to us. However, when we choose to look at those things, any of them, Jesus and His word begins to fade in importance to us.

When church folks turn their hearts from the Lord, they often shine their spotlight on the faults, or their perception of faults in their brothers and sisters. "I would have done a better job than he/she did." When he/she stepped up to do that work, did you also volunteer? How much did you do to help them in their work? Likewise, when we look at Jesus with our whole spiritual focus, we simply do not see the shortcomings in our brothers and sisters. Consider this something of a thermometer of your spiritual health. If you criticize what your brothers and sisters do, you have a temperature and may be suffering from a spiritual virus far more damaging than COVID or any other natural virus. If you choose to see the good things they do and find joy in encouraging and helping them, you are in sound spiritual health.

Jesus teaches a simple, but oh so challenging lesson in our study passage. Wherever we choose to "Look" embraces either the light or the darkness of that object, and it slowly absorbs into our hearts and affects the way we think and live. This lesson is so needful for godly people. We live in the world and hear its screams for compliance with its values and ideas six days a week. We go to church and spend about two or three hours on Sunday with our spiritual family. Which influence soaks deeper into our soul? Which has the greater impact on our thoughts and our conduct? During the week, we can neglect Scripture, prayer, and extended reflection on the Scriptures we read, and the world's ideas will quickly mold our minds into its shape. Or we can live Jesus' description of how we should live in a dark world, shine as His light in this dark world, and drive out a little darkness in our corner of this darkness. If we hope to be His light, we must spend daily time with Him. Keep Him and His teachings fresh and vibrant in our minds. "Listen" and "Look" to Him and His ways, as revealed only in Scripture, and you shall realize a healthy distance from this world and its enticing songs. Which do we choose today?

Lord bless and help,
Joe Holder

Eye—Window to the Soul

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:22-24 KJV)

Every point Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount is a timeless truth that His children need in every age and culture. A cliché states the thought contained in the title to this study, “The eye is the window to the soul.” Where we focus our mind’s eyes reveals our deepest choices and priorities. When a believer in Jesus invests more personal and emotional energy in anything other than Jesus and His teaching in Scripture, their joy will diminish, and their faith will become fruitless. Pastors often hear one rationalization after another when this happens. “I’m not really compromising my faith. This idea that is so important to me is really a part of my faith.” If it is truly part of your faith, would you provide book, chapter, and verse from Scripture that affirms your claim? No Scripture? Abandon the idea for the sake of your faith in Jesus. He teaches we can’t do both.

Jesus takes us to the heart of His call, His commandment, to us. “...if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” If our “eye,” the emphasis of our life and energy, where we invest time and energy, physical and emotional energy, is “single,” wholly committed to learning and following Jesus and His teachings, that glorious “Light” shall flood our being and bless us with joy, peace, and a fruitful faith that cherishes serving Jesus by serving our brothers and sisters. Our attitude toward serving them, not working to manipulate their serving us, is undeniable evidence of where our “Eye” is truly focused, or is not focused at all. If we slowly drift into ignoring or even resenting the idea of serving our brothers and sisters, and work at rationalizing our neglect, we have an “Eye problem” and a “Soul problem” that shall slowly infect every part of our spiritual life and health. We are charting a sure course for a fruitless faith and a joyless life.

When Jesus told the disciples, “*I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing,*” (John 15:5 KJV) He affirmed this truth. When we attempt to serve Jesus plus our own agenda or private ideas, anything other than Him and His teachings, we effectively tell Him that we are not content with Him only. We try to rationalize that our personal passion apart from Him is really part of our service to Him, though we can’t find a single verse in Scripture to support our ideas. And we also disagree with Him regarding His teaching in this verse. A branch in a grape vine doesn’t depend on the vine plus the plum tree or the peach tree, or the weeds that grow all around. A branch is wholly, exclusively dependent on the vine. And that is Jesus’ point. Whenever we divide our loyalties and attempt to use our eyes to see multiple objects all at the same time, we experience the inevitable result. The eye becomes confused, and we struggle with darkness. And Jesus’ words prove oh so true, “**how great is that darkness!**”

The contrast between self-ignited “Fire” from our private passions and the flame of God’s grace poured out on those who strive to follow Him alone is vivid. Two passages will make the point.

*Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of **your fire**, and in the sparks that **ye have kindled**. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.* (Isaiah 50:11 KJV)

Whatever our “Cause” or fire, if Jesus didn’t ignite it, the fire will die, and the Lord’s warning shall come, “...**ye shall lie down in sorrow.**” And now the positive option, keeping a “Single,” focused eye (Lifestyle) on the Lord.

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19 KJV)

Do you long for that “Day star,” that guiding light of the Lord’s smiling approval and blessing, to arise in your heart and to show you His way clearly? Peter shows us the exclusive path to that glorious result. We “...do well that ye take heed” to the Lord’s light, not the sparks of our own private fires. Only as we keep our faith-eye singly focused on Jesus and His teachings shall we see the guiding, peaceful “day star” arise in our hearts. We may rationalize our darkness and live in our private fire, or we may choose Jesus and His exclusive way which leads us to the bright, reliable “day star” that He sends to guide us. Pause and contemplate the contrast between a campfire we build and a bright star that shines visibly in the sky, even in the daytime. By our choices of things we serve, we choose one or the other. You can’t choose your private campfire and still enjoy the “Day star” in your life. Jesus draws the map simply and clearly.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Paul repeats this truth. When God repeats the same principle in Scripture, He shows us how important that truth is with Him. Will we accept His light and way, or will we ignore Him and choose our private campfire?

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Romans 6:13 KJV)

*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, **his servants ye are to whom ye obey;** whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Romans 6:16 KJV)*

Together these two verses mark the Lord’s judgment and instruction/warning. If something is so important to us that we invest personal time and energy, especially emotional energy, into it, that thing becomes our master and we its servant. Scripture allows no neutrals. If we choose the sparks of our own fire, our own ideas or philosophies, Paul warns; obeying sin (Anything or anyone not documented as His way and will in Scripture. “...whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Romans 14:23b) can lead to only one

conclusion, “death,” the death of our joy, our peace, and our fellowship with Jesus. John teaches the same truth in 1 John 1. We realize the blessing of fellowship with Jesus and with His people only as we walk with Him and follow His ways exclusively. If we choose the Lord and His way, His way specifically taught in Scripture, that obedience, however difficult the path, shall lead to “righteousness,” a life quality that pleases the Lord and brings His blessings and fellowship to our lives. Notice the two opposite outcomes of the opposing behaviors in the lesson. Faithful “Obedience” will produce “Righteousness.” And “Sin” produces “Death.” When we choose one or the other behavior, we also choose the fruit that it grows.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Jesus drew a line that cannot be bent or compromised. Whenever a believer strains to embrace their faith plus some other—any other—philosophy or idea that commands loyalty and devotion or service, however hard they strain to maintain balance between this idea and their faith, eventually, usually much sooner than they realize, they will fall into the pattern Jesus here describes. When their faith and whatever competes in their mind for similar loyalty come into conflict, they will develop a pattern that either abandons that other idea in favor of Jesus and their faith, or they will rationalize why their faith must take a back seat to their idea. The two cannot—and will not—continue indefinitely in our minds in competition. One will take over and the other fade.

Jesus wisely, and instructively, chose the eye as the analogy for this problem. How many things can you truly “See” at the same time? What happens when you try to focus on more than one thing at a time? You quickly get eye strain, and you fail to carefully “See” either object. He knew what we often fail to grasp. Our minds are much like our sense of vision. We can only truly focus on one thing at a time. To the extent we “Look” at one idea, any other idea fades out of our thinking.

If you were to put a stopwatch on the ideas that occupy your mind for a month, how much time and emotional “Fire” would appear under your faith in Jesus, always affirmed by specific Scripture, not by your good intentions? And how much time and emotional “Fire” would appear under the heading of your favorite philosophy or ideas that never appear in Scripture? I suggest that you honestly know already which of the two commands the most of your time and emotional fire. If Jesus and His teachings specifically taught in the New Testament are not prominent and without competition, it might be a wise decision to spend some serious prayer time with Him, praying for forgiveness and for a renewed passion to serve Him alone by serving His people. When we do do one, we do the other; when we neglect one, we also neglect the other.

Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Pastors often hear folks try to explain how difficult—but possible—it is for them to do both. Jesus said it was not possible, “**Ye cannot...**” “Mammon” in this lesson was translated from a Greek word that identifies money personified. By extension, it also applies to anything that we exalt and devote ourselves to serve. Or, in Paul’s words, we become its slave. For some folks today, that replacement god may be one political party or politician or the other, or any number of things that take charge of our emotions and consume our emotional energy. We repeatedly prove Jesus to be correct. What do we choose today? Jesus? Or whatever you think is the most important thing or person in your life? Jesus is trustworthy through life and death? Can we say the same about our substitute?

Elder Joe Holder