

# Christian Myopia

by Staff

*Forerunner, January 2002*

Myopia is an abnormal eye condition in which light rays from distant objects, passing through the lens, focus in front of the retina instead of on it. This causes blurry vision. The more common term for this problem is nearsightedness, a malady that affects millions of people. Philosophically, we often see myopia in people who lack foresight or an ability to see something as clearly they could or should.

Anyone who has nearsighted vision (as the author of this article does) realizes that most objects beyond just a few feet are fuzzy and out of focus. Thankfully, we have the knowledge and technology today to overcome this obstacle, so the physical problem is usually corrected by eyeglasses, contact lenses, and sometimes even surgery. Left untreated, however, it can evolve into bigger problems, such as eyestrain and severe headaches.

Myopia's obvious parallel to a Christian's life can be seen in an inability to see the future as God reveals it to us in His Word. If it is allowed to continue, a person may be unable or have no desire to see the consequences of man's failures and the biblical ramifications of events as they unfold. Such people live in a fog, totally unaware of the urgency of the times.

Another facet of spiritual myopia concerns a person's efforts to see himself as God and others see him. This dilemma of blindness can result in a disregard for overcoming problems as they affect others and himself. When this happens, a person's spiritual growth stagnates and eventually backslides until, as Peter says, he returns to "wallowing in the mire" (II Peter 2:22).

Myopia occurs especially in our limited capacity to see God as He really is versus the fuzzy "God" the world embraces. Each person's upbringing and experience affect and sometimes dictate our views of what God is like. A myopic Christian's indistinct view of God will keep him from understanding what God is doing and what God expects of him.

In God's revelation to John, particularly in his message to the seven churches of Asia, one church had a problem with vision, the church of the Laodiceans. As we know, Jesus warns this church of God about a number of spiritual matters. Lukewarmness, materialism, and spiritual pride are just a few of His indictments of them. He recommends steps for their spiritual improvement in Revelation 3:18-19:

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Laodicea was an actual first-century church, and its recorded spiritual condition exposes characteristics—broadly termed "Laodiceanism"—that affect God's church today. In a way, it has affected nearly every person to varying degrees. It has influenced beliefs and views, causing many of God's people to lose their godly sight, and crippling many in making and keeping God's way as their

way. Myopic Christianity attacks our spiritual senses in much the same way as an uncontrolled tongue (James 3:2-12) and spiritual blindness and deafness (I Corinthians 2:9) do in those who have never had the advantage of God's Spirit—or worse, in those who have rejected it.

### **The "Eye" of the Body**

With these few words in Luke 11:33-36, Jesus succinctly deals with the subject of spiritual vision or lack of it:

No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.

If we indeed allow God's light (John 8:12) to be placed within the lamp, us, and then do nothing with it, it is like hiding it in a secret place. This is true in our everyday experiences and within the church. This hiding of God's light is another form of spiritual myopia, and perhaps surprisingly, it concerns our relationships with and how we view others. If we become shortsighted in our relations with other people—seeing only what we want to see and not all that we should see—we can become judgmental and critical or patronizing and denigrating to others. In effect, we become the standard, the barometer, that only we know and by which we judge all others.

A common problem with the greater church of God today is this lack of light and focus on truly godly issues rather than trivial ones. Seeing only one's personal point of view has caused a general blindness within the church, spawning many of the current issues and problems. Too many members can focus only on their ideas and viewpoints, lacking the insight to see beyond the comfort of their own secret places. Even when the points such people espouse are true, their demeanor toward their brethren is often hostile and their efforts to overcome are lackluster or not based on godly principles.

We can also see elements of spiritual myopia in the independent mindset that many within the church embrace today. Looking exclusively inward, some see themselves as the only viable holders and/or purveyors of God's truth. Though they may attend with a larger group, they see themselves as independent thinkers or needing only themselves and God. Some have taken this independent spirit to the extreme of forsaking others in service and church attendance (Hebrews 10:25). They can even become quite comfortable in their own shortsighted way, wanting little or no interaction with any others who might not see things exactly as they do.

One interesting facet of Luke 11:33-36 is that Jesus alludes to the fact that not everything is distinctly black or white. Verse 35 implies that there are varying degrees of light: "Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness." All light we see is not at the same level of brightness, so some may see part of the truth but not its fullness. It can also suggest that each person may be "in the dark" on any given matter at any point in their relationship with God and others, while being "in the light" on other matters. Similarly, this can illustrate our relative levels of conversion as well.

Since we know that the true light comes only from God, any variance in intensity must come from how *we* see or not see something. While verse 34 treats the extremes of how we view things, whether optimistically or pessimistically, many of God's people are somewhere in the middle, like the Laodiceans "neither cold nor hot" (Revelation 3:15). Christ's wish is that we are one or the other!

Of course, the most obvious lesson of these verses is that we should desire Christ's light as our light, seeing and doing things as He would. When we fail in this, Satan's influence and dark ways can become our ways over time. We can totally lose the proper vision and allow his deceptions to blind us. We are all part way down this path; we all have our spiritual blind spots, seeing life and the church through unfocused eyes. Unfortunately, too many of us are not using the aids that would remedy our myopia and put us back on track.

### **Seeing Myself**

A number of years ago, a Topicsmaster in a youth speech club posed this question: "Who would you most like to meet (dead or alive) and why?" Answers ranged from deceased relatives to various biblical characters. One of the more interesting answers was, "I'd like to meet and see myself, just like others can see me." Since this answer came from a young person, it perhaps did not have the impact it might have had coming from an older, more battle-scarred and problem-filled individual. It nevertheless made a point we should all consider.

Even the most honest person cannot see himself as others do, for which we should be thankful. Each person is blind to certain parts of his character even when he is most brutally honest with himself, such as during the annual self-evaluation Christians conduct before Passover. Even God in His mercy reveals issues and problems to us only as we can handle them (I Corinthians 10:13). Yet, we must consider how myopic we are about ourselves in comparison to how we see others in our families, in our congregations, in other churches of God, or even in the world.

James 1:19-27 tackles this subject of personal myopia. Notice verses 23-24: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." Here again is a person who is going only halfway, hearing God's Word but doing nothing with it. How often do we hear a message, seeing it only as it applies to others, not to ourselves? Such a person may be able to hear the truth but filters it only through his clouded eyes, or worse, never sees how it relates to him at all.

We see these extremes in God's church today. Some people spend endless hours studying and conveying their discoveries to others, yet hypocritically do not follow their own advice or God's. They may even have understanding that could help others, but potential hearers see only the problems that drown out what they may be trying to say. As the saying goes, "Your actions speak so loudly that I can't hear a word you say." God wants well-rounded individuals in His Family, those who understand His way of life and cooperate with the rest of His family—not extremists who may be right in their knowledge but wrong in their overall viewpoint, including proper interaction with others.

Another extreme exists in those who are mere spectators, allowing others to preach at them without doing anything about it or even proving or disproving it for themselves. They take a "nothing ventured, nothing compromised" stance, which, though it may be technically correct, reveals a person

who will not venture outside his "comfort zone." It is a stance guaranteed to produce no growth whatsoever, either in doctrine or in their personal relationships. All this person sees is his own little world, a perspective that runs contrary to what God purposes for us. He is preparing us to be kings and priests in the world to come, both of which demand an outward, growth-oriented attitude.

Still another extreme behavior occurs in those who believe because they are told to, not because of their own involvement with God and His Word. They see what others tell them to see, not what they should see aided by God's Spirit. While it is good to be submissive, God wants us to seek Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; Isaiah 55:6; Amos 5:4; etc.) and prove all things (I Thessalonians 5:21; I John 4:1). A true Christian must be actively involved in pursuing God's way of life.

All these positions show an inability or lack of desire to see and respond to God's truth as we should. This is true physically. A myopic person cannot see things clearly enough to react properly. For instance, a nearsighted baseball player cannot see a pitch clearly enough to take an effective swing at the ball. A myopic Christian cannot see the truth clearly enough to use it in his life.

James 1:25-27 helps us to learn to see clearly and respond properly:

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

In essence, James describes a person who sees the truth from God's Word and responds by using it. He sees himself as an instrument of God to be used, even spent, in service to Him and His people. He holds the feelings and well being of others to be as important as his own. Unlike the myopic person, he sees beyond his comfort zone, following the example of Jesus Christ.

## **Vision or Blindness**

"Where there is no revelation [vision], the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law." This well-known verse in Proverbs 29:18 is brief, but it displays an astounding insight into human nature and a person's ability to keep his priorities straight without losing his vision.

As time goes on, many unusual things are prophesied to happen to this world and to God's church. As we have seen with the turmoil of today's church, many people have seemingly lost the vision we were taught. The blindness that has struck many of the brethren probably has more to do with how we actually were than what we have actually become. As we struggle individually and collectively to regain our spiritual compasses, we will need to make the effort to determine what is true and begin building diligently on that solid foundation (I Corinthians 3:11; John 14:6).

As with most things in life, our growth from this point on will come down to some rather simplistic choices: right versus wrong, truth versus error, light versus darkness, good versus evil. Even though we rarely understand anything perfectly in the Word of God or discern God's every thought, we do have a few simple aids to guide us in any of our activities:

» We have a choice to see or not to see what God has revealed.

- » We can be a doer and not just a hearer.
- » We can follow the basics of God's law as best we can, asking Him for help to deepen our understanding.
- » We can remember that the essence of God's law is love toward God and love toward each other, allowing it to steer us in the right direction.
- » We can remember that the world has been blinded by Satan the Devil (II Corinthians 4: 3-4), and if we wish to have 20/20 spiritual vision, we must make sure not to become mired in its ways.

Just as myopia is correctable as an eye problem, so too are our own blind spots, if we go to the correct source and follow His exact instructions. As the apostle Peter says in his second epistle:

For he who lacks these things [mentioned in verses 5-7] is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (II Peter 1:9-11)