

## Do You See God? (Part One)

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The Word of God guarantees that, if we do not see God, then we will have difficulty keeping any kind of deep commitment, whether it is to our marriage, employment, or, most importantly, our relationship with God.

An old American adage claims that "seeing is believing." A state, Missouri, even uses a form of this saying as its motto: "The Show-Me State." It implies that, unless we see physical proof, we will not believe what another tells us is true. We Americans have grown quite cynical and skeptical about things. By being constantly bombarded with television, movies, and other entertainments, we know that much of what we see is either staged, blown out of proportion, or even part of a planned disinformation program. In our skepticism, when we hear something, we are not quite sure we believe it.

We know that, biblically, just because one "sees" does not mean that he understands or believes. However, how deeply do we understand this?

### Seeing Is NOT Believing

In John 1:14, the apostle John writes: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." People saw Jesus Christ "in the flesh," yet He was no ordinary human being! These people beheld God!

Earlier, in verse 10, John says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." The people of His day saw Him, but did they believe Him? Did they see God in the flesh walking with them, teaching them, giving them the eternal truths of life, and showing them how to live by both word and example? Were they just so overwhelmed and in awe, knowing that this was God, that they said, "Yes, I see Him. I believe Him. I will follow Him"? No, the Bible's testimony is that they did not know Him, even though they saw Him:

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:11-13)

Just because we see does not mean that we will believe because there is a spiritual aspect to this sort of seeing and believing. This passage indicates that "His own" showed not even a flash of recognition as to His true identity.

Consider the incongruity of this. We frequently hear of personalities in the public eye affecting some kind of a mode of dress or lifestyle that will set them apart and make them instantly recognizable. Entertainers like Elton John with his glasses and Liberace with his flamboyant style and dress come to mind.

In this regard, compare Jesus Christ, the most unique Personality that ever lived in the history of mankind! He was a one-of-a-kind, the only human who ever lived life sinlessly. Yet, even those of His generation who saw Him could not identify Him, God in the flesh!

This suggests that one must be predisposed to believe, to have the ability to "see." It is interesting to note that, to those who exercised this faith, "He gave the power [right, authority, ability] to become the children of God" (verse 12). Only those who "see" and then "receive" Christ can enter into a relationship with God that results in nothing less than the creation of a new being.

### **Inability to See Christ**

John 7:1 relates an incident in Jesus' life that illustrates that seeing is *not* believing: "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him." How incongruous! God in the flesh, whom they did not recognize, they sought to kill!

Then, in verse 4, His brothers give their advice about what He should do, that He should reveal Himself to the world. In verse 5, the apostle John makes an editorial comment: "For even His brothers did not believe in Him." Even His own brothers, who lived with Him day in and day out, did not believe in Him! It is almost unbelievable that someone living with God would not recognize—would not see—Him as God!

Jesus finally went to the Feast of Tabernacles secretly. "And there was much murmuring among the people concerning Him. Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people'" (verse 12). Would God in the flesh deceive? Clearly, they did not recognize Him.

"The people answered [Him] and said, 'You have a demon: Who is seeking to kill you?'" (verse 20). This statement, accusing God of being a destructive demon, treads close to blasphemy!

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." [Some were beginning to understand.] Others said, "This is the Christ," but some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him. (John 7:40-43)

Notice all the opinions that people held about Him! In Matthew 16:13, Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" They answer, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." People were confused about His identity!

If God cannot be clearly identified, how can He possibly be worshipped? Under such confusion, how can people claim to see Him, to understand how important He is to their lives? For us, converted Christians, He is absolutely vital! He is in us and interested in every aspect of our lives.

Matthew 13:54-57 follows His teaching on parables:

And when He had come to His own country [Nazareth, where He had grown up], He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters,

are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him.

Here, He did not affect people positively. The overwhelming evidence of Scripture is that mankind did not see Him. Instead, they were perplexed or disturbed. He created divisions. Some were outright offended. Notice Jesus' reaction: "But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.' And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (verses 57-58).

His statement begins to reveal an application of "seeing" to us. Will He be working in our lives if we do not see Him? If we do not understand His purpose, what He is working out in us? We have come out of a world in which there is just as much, if not more, confusion today regarding Him as when He walked the earth. The concern is not whether we can identify Him, because we recognize Him as the Christ—we "see" the real Jesus—but do we see Him as a vital part of our lives?

### **Physical Versus Eternal**

A reading of the book of Hebrews can reveal how physically oriented we are. This orientation toward the physical plays a powerful part in whether we will ever really see Christ as a vital part of our lives. Hebrews 1:10-12 contains a statement that we need to consider:

You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.

To us, the physical *seems* so solid, indestructible, and permanent, at least in terms of our own brief existence. But Hebrews tells us to get our attention off the immediate, the "around and about," the physical. We are to reorient our lives, our thinking, our focus, toward the eternity of Christ's dominion.

A profound reality of God and His Word is that *they are changeless*. "You remain," Hebrews 1:11 says, but we grow old and die. The eternal values never change, and even more exciting, they can be taken through the grave.

What is important in our lives? The immediate gratifications offered by this world? The things we possess? The accomplishments we achieve? If so, we will not likely see God very frequently. Or, we can ask, what in our lives demands our time, effort, and thought? An objective answer to this may reveal what we really worship.

We cannot identify with or worship anything transient. Something must "remain" or "continue" (ASV), as verses 10-12 tell us. Something eternal must abide; something unchanging must continue. To this we can cling, and within it, we can live our life by faith.

### **A Test**

Some of us have taken an inkblot or Rorschach test. The ink spots are somewhat intriguing to figure out, but there is never a "right" answer because it depends on the perspective of the observer. Some see insects or flowers or faces or geometric shapes.

What if the tester removes the test from sight and asks, "What did you see?" Most people tend to concentrate on the ink and its shapes. They see the spot, but they do not consciously see the paper. It is there, but they ignore it as if it is not there.

What should this teach us? People see what they want to see. They see what they expect to see. They see what they are educated to see.

In this instance, the physical and the spiritual work in the same way. The converted mind is predisposed to perceive the spiritual aspect of a circumstance. We have this predisposition because of the calling of God and the gift of His Spirit, but we must still choose to see the spiritual. Then, we must choose to follow through on it, regardless of the cost to ourselves.

In Hebrews 4:1-2, we see an example of this:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

Consider these Israelites. They saw a multitude of miracles performed by God through His servant Moses and on occasion through Aaron. They experienced the water turn to blood and frogs hop all over the place. They experienced the eerie, penetrating darkness that pervaded all of Egypt. They experienced the division between Goshen and Egypt, and they knew God spared them from the remaining plagues.

They knew something was "working" in their lives, did they not? They could see it occurring when the flies were all over Egypt except in Goshen. They saw it happen through five other plagues. They experienced it again on Passover night when the firstborn of Egypt were killed, but the firstborn of Israel, shielded by the blood on their doorposts and lintels, were not. Did they not see that?

Did they not spoil the Egyptians? Did they not leave Egypt? Did not God part the Red Sea before their eyes and drown all the Egyptian army in its waters? Did not they eat manna supplied from heaven every day for forty years in the wilderness? Did they not see water flow like a river out of solid rock? Did they not see quail blown toward them so that they had all the meat they could eat?

They saw the glory of God descend on Mount Sinai. They felt the earth shake under their feet. They saw the pillar of fire and cloud. They *saw* the glory of God rest upon the Tabernacle when it was set up. Nevertheless, every single one of them, except for two men and their families, perished!

Is seeing believing?

What about us? We associate with God's true church. Are we truly a part of it? Do we really "see" it? Do we recognize what is happening in the life of the church? Can we examine past and present events in our Christian lives and project their consequences into our future?

Is seeing believing? The Israelites never really saw God in those works. What they physically saw did not produce the spiritual faith that enables one to see God, because, as Hebrews 4:1-2 explains, the one whose eyes are opened must voluntarily respond. The Israelites never responded positively to God.

The Christian's responsibility is to respond to God's calling through acts of faith. The apostle reminds the Hebrews of the deadly seriousness of their situation. God's calling is not indiscriminately handed out to anyone who might happen to see or read. It is a personal invitation. God has addressed it specifically to us!

These verses also contain a warning: Since Israel did not enter into God's rest, someone else will, because God will fulfill His purpose. The Christian ought not to think that he will automatically enter it in their place.

### **Living by Faith**

We need to consider seriously the Israelites in the wilderness. They heard the message; but they did not respond. A reading of the preceding chapters in the book of Hebrews reveals that their failure to respond is variously called "hardness of heart," "unbelief," or "disobedience." Even though each of these terms is distinctively different, they are synonymous in this context.

Why did this failure to respond occur? It is simply because Israel kept desiring to return to Egypt. They looked at events through Egyptian-trained eyes and minds.

We see what we want to see. We see what we expect to see. We see what we are educated to see.

We must live our lives based on God's "words of promise." Hebrews 11:13 says the heroes of faith "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off." They rejoiced in those promises because they believed what they saw, even though it was far off. They identified themselves with it and God. This ability to see spiritually gave direction to their lives and set them apart from the rest of mankind.

How important is it for us to take advantage of this opportunity to include God consciously in all of our thinking? Jesus Himself answers this question in John 6:29: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." He is saying that the purpose of the manifestation of God's works in Christ (or the revelation, the giving to some the ability to see God) is to produce faith.

In verse 39, He makes a clear statement of God's will regarding those He has called and given to Christ: "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (verse 39).

He continues in verse 40, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son . . ." Does He mean "sees Him physically?" No, He means sees in the sense of "comprehends," "perceives," or "understands." We can plug these meanings into this verse: ". . . that everyone who [comprehends, perceives, or understands] the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

### **Paul's Example**

We need to remember that the carnal mind is "alive and kicking" within us. Even though we are baptized and have the Spirit of God, it is still there, exerting its influence, which Romans 8:7 says is "enmity against God."

Before conversion, the apostle Paul was certainly well-schooled in the Scriptures, as far as the Jews could teach him. The Bible says he studied at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was very intelligent and incisive of mind, a man of conviction and determination. Yet, this same man God had to physically blind and thoroughly humble before he could see Him. Even though Paul had a command of the Scriptures that few people have ever had at their calling, he could not see God working in the infant Christian church.

Christ, in a mild rebuke, says to Paul on the way to Damascus, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5; 26:14). We should take this reproach to heart as well because it teaches us that the carnal mind will reject the evidence that God gives, even though it is suffering and in pain. Thus, God's calling and His predisposing us to see spiritually and to identify with His Son are of no avail unless His Word becomes integrated within us.

How are we hearing God's Word? Disinterestedly? Sceptically? Cynically? Critically? Indifferently? Eagerly? Remember, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Hearing starts the processing of the revelation of God, and we must consciously work at it. It includes what we are "hearing" this moment, as well as what we have heard over the last six months, the past year, the past decade, and the whole time of our conversion! How are we listening? Do we follow through on the things that we hear? Unless we do, we are not hearing—and we will not truly see God!

### **The Biblical Fool**

Psalms 14:1, 4 contains a sobering concept:

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. . . . Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up My people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord?

Let us hope that none of us is this "blind." From my experience as a minister, it is possible that Christians can be what David describes as a "fool." One may say, "Well, since my conversion, I have never said that there is no God." Maybe we have and never realized it!

How could that happen? "Fool" here is *nabal*. Remember the story of David and Abigail? Abigail's husband was named Nabal, and he was a fool. It means someone who is contemptible, someone who is empty. It does not mean "an atheist" or one who has no contact with God. It does not even mean that such a person does not see God in His creation. The fool that David describes here may readily admit that God is Creator and claim that this belief plays a major role in his life.

This person, this "fool," though not an atheist, lives as if he believes no God exists, either to bless with reward or to curse with punishment. A *nabal* is not stupid; he is not a person who does not reason at all. He is a person who reasons wrongly. A *nabal* is a person who *chooses* or *assumes* to ignore the fact of God's authority over his life. He sees God as an "absentee landlord" who may be safely disregarded because he assumes that God is not really active in His Creation. Now that is foolishness!

In biblical contexts, foolishness can be sin! The fool's problem is not with his brain but his heart. The fool is capable of grasping the things of God, but he possesses no real fear or reverence for God and

the things of God. This results in nothing less than a "practical atheism." Even though he may readily admit that God is Creator, he lives his life as though God is nowhere around. He has produced a dichotomy between what he intellectually knows and the way he lives. God says such a person is a fool. He is, in reality, saying in his heart, "There is no God."

That is sobering because any of us can fall into this state, as Psalm 14:5 implies: "There [fools] are in great fear, for God is with the generation of the righteous." Like us, the fool is aware of God. When the punishment, the curse, for sin comes—when God begins to reveal Himself as the Judge of sinners—then the fool, because of what He knows of God, also knows great fear. If he truly thought, "There is no God," the fear would not exist, but he knows that there really is a God, though his life belies it.

Do we see God in His activities? Do we see God in His works? Do we see God building faith in us? Do we see God in His church? Do we see God in the physical creation? Romans 1:20 tells us that God's creation reveals His power and authority—His very deity. It is a type to help us understand that, by these physical works, we can identify with God and know that He is working within His spiritual creation as well.

A Christian goes through an educational process designed to help him see what is important and valuable and what is unimportant and worthless. In other words, God is training us to understand what is reality and what is vanity. We, however, are responsible for admitting that evidence into our minds and humbly submitting to it—or in rejecting the evidence, assuming the guilt of denying God.