

## Spiritual Blindness: Choosing A Curse

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My last two messages were about II Corinthians 4:4 and identifying the God of this age. We will not be going back to that specifically, but we will be returning to one of the main topics, and that is the matter of blindness.

Previously we read,

**Deuteronomy 28:28-29** “The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways.”

When we read the history of Israel, we find evidence of God's faithfulness to this curse in the records of national and individual madness, blindness, and confusion of heart. This curse is particularly devastating because it hobbles the ability to even understand the real problem, so that finding a solution becomes all but impossible. The problems of our nations continue to mount, yet the citizens and leaders cannot identify the real cause.

In this nation, the Republicans blame the Democrats for all the problems, and the Democrats blame the Republicans. The media cast aspersions on the current president, and the current president blasts the media. And the nation demonstrates its blindness by focusing on this circus, as though the solution might be found in the right policies, people, or party.

But until the nation recognizes that the true problem is that God is out of the picture, we will continue not to prosper. The few figures who dare to suggest that sin is the root of our problems are scorned and vilified. This nation has degenerated even further from where we were in 2001 when some leading evangelicals connected the dots between the September 11th attacks and national immorality. They were shouted down so quickly and overwhelmingly that those men regretted speaking the truth, and yet if the

nation is blind to the reason for its predicaments, it certainly cannot turn things around.

**Proverbs 14:34** Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

Part of the reproach that accompanies sin is blindness. It is easy for us to recognize this on the national level, but we must also accept that this holds true for the individual as well, and even for the converted.

**Psalms 111:10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.

If we sow obedience, in time we reap understanding, but if we sow disobedience, we reap madness, blindness, and confusion of heart.

Psalms 19, verse 8 shows this same relationship.

**Psalms 19:8** The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

When one upholds the commandments, one's understanding becomes clearer, but the inverse is also true. When one breaks the commandments, one's eyes become darkened.

Now this speaks to the seriousness of sin. The wages of sin is death, and sometimes that is where we stop thinking, and yet these verses teach us that sin also muddles the understanding. This underscores the foolishness of thinking that we can sin now and just repent later because God will forgive us. Yes, God forgives sins that are not willful, but there are other effects of sin besides the death penalty that He may not remove right away, if at all.

One is the effect that sin has on the mind. Repentance does not restore everything to where it was before. The cause-and-effect in these verses also explains why the Bible refers to sin as a snare. It is far easier to get into a snare than it is to get out. Consider that when we sin, we lose some measure of understanding, at least for a time. This blurred state of mind makes it

easier to make another wrong decision. That next sin then further blinds or clouds the judgment, making it easier to stumble yet again. And on it goes, because sin has a terrible power to draw one in deeper.

With God's Spirit, though, we have tremendous help in overcoming, but sin still entangles and blinds even the converted because that is sin's nature. Sin causes blindness, and blindness causes sin.

And there is another pattern we will add to this. It is found in Romans 1, if you would turn there with me. Romans 1 is a pretty long passage, so we will only focus on a few verses. Romans 1, beginning in verse 18. Paul writes:

**Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

This gives us the context which is men who suppress the truth. Some translations say that they suppress the truth *by* their unrighteousness, which reiterates the link between blindness and disobedience. God has given all men a measure of light, but they deliberately turn away from understanding in favor of something that is not true but seems more reasonable to them. In reality, they blind themselves through the choices that they make.

**Romans 1:24** Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.

As we saw in verse 18, man makes the choice to close his eyes, and this verse states God's response. He gives them over to their choices. He does not approve of or accept what they do, but He allows it to play out. At some point in the future, such as the resurrection, they will understand the futility of rejecting God's way.

**Romans 1:26** For this reason God gave them up to vile passions, for even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

So Paul says it a second time, God gives them up to what is in their hearts, and they do not realize that they have cursed themselves with their choices. They probably feel relief and liberation.

**Romans 1:28** And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.

So they began with suppressing the truth and end up with a debased mind. As part of God's judgment, He gives people over to the dominion of the consequences of their choices.

These verses in Romans 1 depict God eventually taking His hands away to allow people to further mess up their own lives, but other scriptures show God actively amplifying the effect of sin. And that is, sometimes God makes the spiritual plight even worse.

In Amos 8, verse 11, God calls for a famine of hearing His Word. It is a different metaphor, but it is still analogous to blinding. It still affects the understanding. The famine of hearing is another devastating curse, because God takes away the very thing that could help the nation, being able to hear His truth. That may seem cruel, but that is what the people chose. They did not heed the revelation that He had given to them, so He began to take it away.

II Thessalonians 2:10-12 also shows God's activity, and there Paul writes of those who are perishing because they do not have a love of the truth. God responds by sending strong delusion, by sending more of what they already treasured, and it is for condemnation. Some may consider God to be mean-spirited, to use a common phrase today, but remember that the people chose this blindness, and God basically gives them a second helping.

Now this pattern also gives us a glimpse into what God did with the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The account tells of Pharaoh hardening his heart, but it also says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. In fact, it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart before Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Hardening the heart is a type of blindness. And this too may seem unfair or unjust because it

sounds like God took away Pharaoh's free moral agency, and Pharaoh had no choice but to follow the path to destruction.

In this nation we cherish our freedom to choose so greatly that the thoughts that Pharaoh was denied a choice might make us rather uncomfortable. The fact is, Pharaoh did have the opportunity to choose. The story does not begin with God hardening Pharaoh's heart. It begins much earlier when Pharaoh chose to oppress and afflict the descendants of Abraham, and he even commanded infanticide. He made that choice free and clear.

However, he did not get to choose the consequences. He did not consider the wretchedness that his choice would bring forth. God had said centuries before that He would curse those who cursed Abraham, and Abraham's descendants were included in that. So when Pharaoh cursed Israel, God in turn cursed Pharaoh with a heart that would continue to make bad choices, ending in his destruction. His desire to dominate and control God's people became the snare that he chose and which he could not escape.

Please turn with to Matthew chapter 6, where we find Christ's teaching on spiritual eyesight and blinding.

**Matthew 6:21-24** “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

This contains metaphoric usages of the heart, the eyes, light and darkness, and thus it can teach us about spiritual blindness. The basic theme here is our focus, the things we set our eyes on or set our hearts on. It is the thoughts that continually return to our mind.

We must understand the broad usage of the word *mammon* and not limit it just to money. Because we are only given two options here, we can define mammon as being anything that is not God. That is a pretty wide net. It can

be anything that is under the sun, and thus it can include countless things that one cannot hold in one's hands and yet are still of the flesh.

We may feel good about being content with the middle-class lifestyle, but if our heart pursues praise, popularity, position, power, or prestige, we are still serving mammon. Those are still cares of the physical life, rather than the conduct of the new life.

This passage teaches that our clarity of vision depends on our focus, on what we turn our attention to. Our spiritual eyesight, whether healthy or diseased, is directly related to what we treasure and to who or what we serve.

Having the wrong treasure or serving the wrong master equates to having a bad eye and walking in darkness. And this means that blinding ourselves can be as simple as letting God slip from our view. We are not retaining God in our knowledge, as we saw in Romans 1.

Not surprisingly, it is when we lose that focus that we stumble, that we sin, that our understanding begins to regress, if only a little, and we start down that easy path of sinning and damaging our understanding and sinning again. Maybe that sounds overblown or excessively dire, but only because we are looking at it like a sped-up time lapse video of a seed that germinates, grows, blossoms, and fades in a matter of seconds. In real life, it usually takes time, time in which we can choose differently.

James also describes this process quite simply, beginning with an enticement, a desire. That enticement is the equivalent of the earthly treasure, the mammon, the taking of one's eyes off of God. He says when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown brings forth death. It sounds very quick and, in some instances, like with Ananias and Sapphira, it can be over in a matter of hours or less. In other instances, like with Judas, that wrong focus, that blindness may persist for years before that internal suppression of truth breaks out in an act that God may give us over to as part of his chastening. That does not mean we are lost, unlike Judas. It means we could have taken a better road and kept ourselves and maybe others from extra grief and regret.

As a final example of blindness among the converted, you are well familiar with the letter to the Laodiceans in which Jesus points out the blindness of which they are blissfully unaware. Their mammon, whatever it may be, fills their minds, keeps them distracted, and comfortable, for they do not realize their true condition or the relationship that they are missing out on.

We can easily apply the ringing words of Elijah here as though the Head of the church is asking His people, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him! But if mammon, follow him! Be hot or be cold, but you cannot serve both!”

Now, let us say that letter applies to us, just hypothetically, of course. We know that it does not really, it is for those other people, that other group. But just for giggles, let us pretend for a minute.

We know that the blindness is something of our doing, because Jesus expects us to anoint our own eyes. He has not caused this blindness though in His chastening He may give us over to it. Nor has Satan caused this blindness. We are responsible for the condition, and we must cooperate with God to turn it around. We must put forth the effort to clean up our vision and to focus on God clearly once again. That is a challenge by itself.

But perhaps, a greater challenge is first discerning whether we are blind and whether we need to own up to this letter. Well, John and Peter give us some indicators. I John 2:11 says that, “He who hates his brother has been blinded,” and that gets back to commandment breaking and blindness, and it includes breaking the spirit of the law.

Peter gives a list of attributes, and he says that if we lack them, then we are blind. It is in II Peter 1:5-9, if you want to turn there and see this. I will just quickly go through them, but in II Peter 1:5, if we lack faith, there is blindness, as verse 9 concludes. If we lack virtue, meaning good character, there is blindness. If we lack knowledge, self-control, or perseverance, there is blindness. If we lack godliness, brotherly kindness, or love, we are shortsighted, it says, even to blindness. If we are not seeing God as clearly as

we should, it will show up in these areas and other areas as well. These indicate that we are still suppressing truth somewhere, still resisting having God in all our thoughts.

In the spring, as Passover approaches, we examine ourselves, and this is right and good. But those who are married know that if we were to only take stock of our relationship with our spouse once a year, our marriage would be in serious trouble. And this is what the letter to Laodicea is about—a massive relationship problem, one that the members are not even aware of. But if we can glimpse a lack of faith, a lack of self-control, a lack of kindness and love, and so forth, we can at least recognize that our relationship with God is not as strong as it could be.

These are areas that we can analyze and look for what mammon—what fleshly thing—is interfering with seeing God more clearly. God wants to help us overcome this blindness. He wants to dine with us, it says, but we have to make the choice first.