

The Christian And The World (Part Six)

The Spirit of the World

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Given 14-Feb-98; Sermon #326

We are going to use these verses in Ephesians 2:2-3 as a foundation upon which we build this next sermon in this series on “the world.”

Ephesians 2:2-3 Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

My previous sermon in this series reminded us about what this phrase “the course of this world” means; and in addition to that, the practical effect that it has on our lives in a day-to-day basis. Whether we are aware of it or not, it is this, brethren, “the course of this world” that we are struggling against in most cases. The “course of this world” has impressed itself upon us simply because we have been literally surrounded by it every waking moment of our life, and we are virtually defenseless against it.

A number of times Herbert Armstrong spoke on this, and he said that he could not possibly have understood what this verse meant until the era, I guess you might call it, of radio and television transmission came along, where invisible frequencies are flying through the air. If you have a receiver that is able to tune into them, you are able to hear words spoken thousands of miles away, half way around the world, because it is being delivered to you through electrical transmission. We do the same thing with pictures, with seeing. You do not actually see it coming through the wire or coming through the air, but nonetheless it comes into your radio or television set. You can see and hear because these invisible transmissions are impacting then upon your eyes and ears. You hear and see them.

“The spirit of this world” works in almost an identical way, and the transmitter in this case is Satan the Devil, and the culture in which we grow. “The prince of the power of the air” has a meaning that 50, 60, or 70 years ago we would have never dreamed it had on our moral and spiritual outlook and on the conduct of our lives.

Perhaps we can understand this phenomenon a little bit better by associating it with the local characteristics and the national characteristics that everyone of us has. Everybody knows that there are characteristics that identify the person almost on sight as being a part of a certain culture, as an American, a Canadian, a German, a Fin, a Swede, and so forth. They are the kind of things that cartoonist and comedians characterize, and so they draw a picture that might make you think of a certain type of person. Among these things are things like language, local dialects, and voice inflections.

Did you ever stop to teach your child to speak the way he does, or she does, with a certain twang in their voice so that they sound like they were from Brooklyn, or so that they sound like they were from Tennessee or North or South Carolina? Nobody has to do that. How do children get it? They just absorb it, and the course of this world is absorbed by our spirit in the same manner. Nobody has to teach us these things. Our spirit is “tuned in,” as Mr. Armstrong put it, and so we pick up these things from our culture, and we are virtually defenseless against it unless we are aware of it and we are resisting it.

The most unfortunate thing about this is that this same principle applies in moral, spiritual, and ethical areas of life—the values upon which we conduct our lives. “The spirit of the culture” is absorbed without resistance, and it becomes a part of our personality. The big problem is that these things have their source in Satan, the prince of the power of the air, and he is the adversary of God, and therefore we become a mixture of good and evil. In an overall sense, we become miniature destroyers of beauty, of harmony, of peace, and eventually life itself. On the other hand, even though we might call ourselves miniature destroyers, we are also able to do good things as well, because the culture is also a mixture of good and evil.

God, through His calling, has broken the iron-clad grip that the course of this world has on us, and He has made us, by His calling, more vividly aware than we have ever been in our lives that this spirit is out there, that it is real, and it is impacting on us. Then, brethren, the struggle between good and evil within us begins in earnest. God intended it be this way, and it is a reality that we have to face.

One of the most important rules for winning in this battle is to know your enemy, and that has been a purpose of this series of sermons about the world. Another rule is to understand how to fight this war and how to resist its domination of our lives, and that is what we have been looking into the last couple of sermons. Nobody can tell us better what are some of the foundational principles needed to fight than the only One who was totally successful in resisting without sin: Jesus the Christ.

I do not know whether you are aware of it, but the Sermon on the Mount was given at the beginning of His ministry, and in that sermon He laid down the foundational elements and rules, the principles, by which those who were followers of Him and of His way were striving to achieve—the purpose of God in their lives, and that they were going to have to fight this battle. So we have been looking at one section of the Sermon on the Mount. We began in Matthew 6:19, and in that section we found that what we hold most dear in life, most important in life, is very important. Our heart has to be protected in order that we are focused on that which is most important to God, and hopefully it becomes the most important to us as well.

Turn with me now to Proverbs 4:

Proverbs 4:20-21 My son, attend to my words; incline your ear unto my sayings. Let them [God's words] not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart.

The word “keep” primarily means “store them.” We keep perishable things in a refrigerator. We store them there so that they will be preserved longer and will be able to be used by us. God says His words have to be stored in our heart. That is where we are to keep them. You might recall something that Jesus said in His ministry. It is in John 6:63. “The words that I speak

unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” The important thing is, “the words . . . are life.”

Proverbs 4:20-23 My son, attend to my words; incline your ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, . . .

Here the word "keep" means "guard, protect, preserve." We've seen the word "keep" here used in two different ways. One way is “store.” The other is “guard.” Store and guard. Store in your heart, but protect your heart. The best way to protect your heart is to put the word of God in it.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

When Jesus speaks of the heart, He is speaking of the central reservoir of all that we are—what we think, what we will, what we hope, what we feel, and what we have affections for. It is what we call “myself,” and it is intertwined with and is implicated with us in such a way that whatever befalls it, befalls us. Whatever the heart seeks, we seek. What its treasure is, our treasure is. Make sure your heart has the right treasure, for where your treasure is, there your heart is going to be (Matthew 6:21). Very important.

Treasure, simply put, is that which we most want out of life. It is what we set our minds on. It is what we think is best for us. It is what we constantly seek. It is what we hate most to lose. It is that which, if we have it, we feel blessed and if we don't, we are on edge and discontented.

The key word might be *constantly*. What we constantly seek. We are to determine a treasure's relative value (still thinking about Matthew 6:19-20) by judging whether it is earthly or heavenly. This has to be thought about, because it is not automatically sin to desire earthly things. The danger, though, is the weight. It is the amount of attention and emphasis that these things have on the way that we conduct our lives.

Let us just jog a thing or two in your mind about how important this is. People will lie to get their treasure. People will commit fornication or

adultery to get their treasure. People will break the Sabbath to possess their treasure. People will murder to possess their treasure. People will commit idolatry to possess their treasure. Where your treasure is, your heart is; and where your heart is, the conduct follows. Do you see what Jesus is getting at? How important is the treasure that we have before our eyes? There is a progression. That is why the proverb says, “Guard your heart,” and the best way to guard it is to keep the word of God stored there.

Matthew 6:20-21 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Jesus adds some logical weight in verse 20 to what He says in verse 19 by using the illustrations of moth, rust, and thieves. These are given to remind us that all earthly treasures that we might set our heart on will diminish in value and finally cease to serve their purpose altogether. So concerning material things, we have to understand nothing has a given—an absolute, constant—value.

Bread, representing food, becomes moldy and it spoils. Garments wear out. Fields become weed-infested. Walls and fences break down. Foundations of buildings sink and twist, and then the building gets cracks in it and it starts to leak. Even gold and silver are subject to oxidation, slow as it might be, but nonetheless they oxidize and they rust away.

In addition there is damage, indeed sometimes havoc, that is wreaked by termites silently working away eating away your building. There are tornadoes that blow your possessions down and away. There are hurricanes that soak them. There are earthquakes that cause buildings to collapse. There are diseases, and there is soil erosion.

Besides that there are taxes that take away a person's wealth. There are wars that destroy a person's wealth. There is confiscation that political bodies use to take over a piece of land. There are stock market crashes. There are prolonged illnesses, deaths, and accidents. And then we all die, and all of the treasures that we might have pinned our hopes on vanish.

Solomon lamented about this in the book of Ecclesiastes. He said, “What good is it that I have all this wealth if I am going to die and pass it on to one of my children who is not worthy of it?” How would you like your father to tell you that? It is in the Book. But you see, he was frustrated by this kind of thing that we are thinking about. Jesus, picking up on that, is trying to get across to us that we have to do something with the time that remains in our life, to get it directed in the right way so that we are in harmony with God.

We have the opportunity to grow as much as we possibly can in the time that God allots to us, and so toward earthly things we have always to operate with the understanding that though they might be desirable and God certainly allows us to work toward those things, we always operate with the understanding that they are not going to last. Not only are they not going to last, they do not, of and by themselves, possess the power—the spiritual value—to give you real joy and peace in life. They just do not have it, and if we want to live joyously and peacefully the way God lives, we will guard our heart and not allow these things to become too big to us. You see, by contrast, heavenly treasures are moth-proof, rust-proof, and burglar-proof. Nothing can take them away. As Peter said, they are reserved in heaven for us. That is where our inheritance lies.

Brethren, we have to think that we are a special group of people—not better, special—because of God's calling. Special because of what He has done. We have not deserved it. Because of what He has done, we become peculiar—different. Our goals have to be rearranged, and we have to rearrange our life in such a way to get in harmony with the purpose of God. God leaves the choices to you and me as to what we are going to do with our time and with our thinking.

Right down at the bottom of this He says, “Guard your heart,” as that is where we do our thinking. Thinking leads to conduct, and what we have our hearts set on is the direction that our life is going in. It is going to go in that direction. We have free moral agency, and this is the way, the beginning you might say, of the way that we have to conduct our life. So His teaching becomes clear. The point is, anything earthly is subject to destruction, and therefore He is showing the relative valuelessness of any earthly treasure.

let us go back to Proverbs again. Look at this succinct advice.

Proverbs 23:4-5 Labor not to be rich. [He does not say, “Do not work at all.” He wants us to work. That is a very important part of His purpose that we work. But He says, "Do not labor to be rich."]
Cease from your own wisdom. Will you set your eyes upon that which is not?

Oh, it is real, but in terms of eternity, it is nothing. "It is not." It may as well not be, almost.

Proverbs 23:5 For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Way up and out of sight. Very pithy advice that anybody ought to be able to understand. Well, never forget the fact that God is not against wealth. He wants His children, though, to have the right focus in life. He wants His children to have some other factor which we will get to just a little bit later to go along with this. God owns everything. He is rich. He is the ultimate example. There is nothing wrong with wealth, but He is telling His kids, “Do not work for that reason, because there are all kinds of pitfalls in that.”

Proverbs 28:20 A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that makes haste to be rich shall not be innocent [or shall not go unpunished].

The purpose of these verses is not against wealth *per se*, but rather making the acquisition of it the main purpose of life. Before we get back to Matthew, let us go back to Deuteronomy the 8th chapter. We will see something right here that Moses wrote. We have a brief resumé in chapter 8 of some of the things that God put them through as they were going through their pilgrimage in the wilderness, and why He did it.

Deuteronomy 8:11 Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping His commandments . . .

This will show whether we have forgotten Him or not—whether we keep His word in our heart. If we keep His word in our heart, we will keep His commandments, because the heart will go in the direction of what it has in it.

Deuteronomy 8:11-14 . . . and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day: Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied: Then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Part of the purpose of this section is to show us what happens to a person who sets his heart on riches—earthly riches. He forgets God, and he begins to think, "I did this myself." Very dangerous business. So He says, "Do not forget."

Deuteronomy 8:15-16 . . . who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; [Do not forget] who brought you forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not [had no experience with], that He might humble you, and that He might prove you, to do you good at your latter end.

Beware of that. God is going to work with us in the same general way. He is going to work to humble us. If we are humble, we will listen to Him. He is going to test us, because He wants to see where we stand, and what He needs to do to bring us into His kingdom. So He will test us like any good teacher does to see where we stand, to see what we need, and to see what we lack and how far we have come.

The entire purpose of it is “to do you good to the latter end”—inheriting His kingdom—so that when we come into the kingdom, we are equipped to carry on the responsibility that He wants to give us in His family in helping His Son, our elder Brother, rule over God's great and vast creation, and to help bring others into His family.

Deuteronomy 8:17-19 . . . And you say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth. But [here comes an important thing] you shall remember the LORD your God:

for it is He that gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto your fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if you do at all forget the LORD your God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.

If we make a spiritual application to this series of verses, especially those last couple of verses, and tie it into what we are studying into in Matthew 6: 19-20 and so forth, then the path to true riches is to yield to God, thus allowing Him to work in us. It is God who gives us the power to become truly rich spiritually and eternally. Which do you think He wants us to choose between? The choice is ours. That is a no-brainer.

Do you understand that it is this approach to life that becomes our best defense against worldliness, and to do it God's way? We go on the offensive against worldliness in us by allowing God to be the One who prospers us.

Did He not supply His children in the wilderness with the water they needed, the food they needed? Their clothes did not wear out. Their shoes did not wear out. He protected them from their enemies. Was He not a pillar of fire at night, and a cloud by day? He led them, guided them, was a shade to them over their heads from the sun. He had walls, as it were, all around them, protecting them. When they needed a path through the ocean, He gave it to them. And still they turned their backs on Him. That is the way human nature is.

Thus we have Jesus' advice back in the book of John in chapter 6. He told this group of people who came to Him this:

John 6:26-27 Verily, verily, I say unto you, You seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perishes . . .

“Labor not for the meat which perishes.” That is in perfect harmony with what we just read in Proverbs 4 and Deuteronomy 8, and also in Proverbs 28.

John 6:27 . . . but for that meat [food] which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him has God the Father sealed.

Here is a major key to success in God's purpose, and it is right in the Sermon on the Mount. I am going to read a few verses further. I will not explain it too much here. Remember He used the word labor. "Labor not," He says. That is work.

John 6:28-29 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, [Do you want to know what the work of God is? Here is the work of God:] that you believe [have faith in, trust] on Him whom He has sent.

We find in the book of Hebrews why Israel failed in the wilderness. In Hebrews 4:1-2, it says there as plain as anything that the gospel was preached unto them. Can you imagine that? The gospel was preached unto them, and they rejected it. It did not do them any good, because what they heard was not mixed with faith. They did not believe it. And if you do not believe it, you cannot follow it; and if you cannot follow it, you cannot live it. It was not in their heart. They had other treasures.

Those people whom Jesus was speaking to in John 6 had other treasures. Jesus could tell. They wanted to fill their bellies. They were not laboring for the meat that endures forever. We are supposed to store the Word in our heart—to preserve it there so that it can be a guide to our lives.

Back to Matthew 6. This is how you resist the world. The world is all around you. The world is in us, but it can be fought, and it can be defeated. It can be overcome. Jesus said, "I have overcome the world. Be of good cheer," meaning that if He did it, *He* in us can also do it. It will give Him a place there. Believe Him. Trust Him. Live what He says to do.

We are looking at foundational teaching on how to overcome the world, and how to grow and really become a son of God. So our real blessedness (tying

this in to Deuteronomy 8) lies in knowing God, in yielding to be in His image, in walking in His way, and communing with Him. This is what produces the right fruit: love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness. Nobody can take those things away from you. That endures forever, and that is the fruit that is intended to be the fruit of our relationship with God.

The practical day-to-day problems with wrong treasures is explained in the next couple of verses in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:22-23 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!

As we are going through this, even though I will separate these verses out and I will expound on them for a period of time, please do not allow them to be separated from the entire context, because Jesus is giving this thing in one-two-three order. This is what you want to do to overcome the world. This is what you want to do in order to be successful in God's way of life. And so the first thing we looked at here is you have got to be careful where your treasure lies, because where the treasure lies, the heart will follow; and where the heart follows, the conduct does. We have got that.

What is the problem with the wrong treasures? Well, He just told us the answer. Our vision becomes blurred. Jesus does not mean (in these two verses) that the eye is the source of the light. Your eye, my eye, does not generate light, but it is nonetheless the light-bringer to the body. It is the guide upon which the entire body depends on for illumination or direction. You might even also say security. It is because of the eye, or the eyes, that the rest of the body is able to make use of light. Before we get too far away from the word light, what is light a symbol of in the Bible? Truth. Jesus has created an analogy using the eye to symbolize something else. Of course, light enters into this, and so does the body as well.

Before He proceeds any further, He said that the eye must be single. That, incidentally, is a literal, correct translation of that Greek word there. You have never heard of a single eye, except on a monster or Cyclops kind of

thing, but that is not what Jesus had in mind here at all. Another word that would help understand it is the word simple—that the eye is simple. Still not real clear yet, but another word would be that the eye is not complicated. It is uncomplicated.

We are slowly but surely getting to something. It means that the eye is sound of vision. I am going to take it one step further, and really I think that this is the best one: The eye is unified. Does your eye just consist of one part? No, it does not. You have the pupil, you have the iris, you have the cornea, and you have all those little rods and cones that are back there. There are thousands, tens of thousands of nerves that go from your eyes, and they head toward your brain. There are all kinds of muscles back there—hundreds of them that are working constantly.

If your eye is unified, it means that every part of the eye is working to enable the entire body to perform its functions. Do you understand what I am getting at? If any part of the eye is not working properly, then the function of the eye becomes somewhat defective, and because the eye is not working correctly, the whole body begins to be affected to some minor or major degree.

Perhaps we can say that if the trunk of nerves that goes back into the brain becomes severed—every other part of the eye might be working beautifully up to that time, but once that is severed, you cannot see. One part, let us say, has been taken out of the operation, and the whole eye goes blind.

The better that *every* part of the eye is functioning, the better one is going to be able to see, and the better the whole body is going to be at carrying out its function. So if the eye is diseased, then it can get to the place where the whole body is in darkness. It will not function properly. He is clearly drawing a comparison between the effect that good and bad eyes have on the function of the rest of the body, and He is letting you and me now that there is something spiritual that He has in mind here.

Eyes that are functioning can make adjustments even when the light is less than perfect. What happens? The muscles work in such a way, and if the

light is dim, the iris opens up. So it is just as if the light was not dim, because the eyes have adjusted. If everything is working right, the rest of the body continues to function reasonably well.

I am farsighted, which means that I can see things far away clearly, but up close I have trouble. If I did not have my glasses on right now, I could not read the words that are on my notes. They would just look like a blur down there. If I do not have my glasses on, I do not care how much light there is . . . I mean, we could be out in the blazing sunlight, and if I had to thread a needle, my hands, my fingers could not accomplish the job because my eyes would not allow me to see the eye of the needle. Do you get the point? If the eye is not in good condition, the body is going to suffer. Now it is not just one part of my body, other parts of the body are going to be affected as well.

Our problem here is to grasp what the eye stands for in this context that Jesus is giving. Jesus has shifted the instruction from concern for what a person focuses upon—what you focus on is your treasure; what I focus on is my treasure. He shifted the focus of His instruction from the treasure to the effect that the wrong treasure has upon a person's life, and the quality of a person's eye is the metaphor that He is using to illustrate the object of His instruction at this point.

The implication is that even as the human body has the natural eye to guide its functions within the physical environment, so the mind, the heart, has a spiritual eye. The heart has a spiritual eye. If the physical eye is healthy, then the person is able to function properly because the body perceives the things around it well, and the whole person is able to discharge his duties and to move about with safety and with circumspection. Because the person sees well, all the parts of the body will be coordinated.

But if the vision is faulty, then we perceive things in a blurred and confused way. We are unsure of what we are doing. We might even be ignorant of a danger that we are in, and a wrong movement, because we cannot see well, might mean the loss of time, might mean a painful injury—a wrong step, at the wrong time (because you did not see) might even cost your life. Right? You know that is right.

Let us fit this thing back into its context. In that first section, beginning in verse 19, He was warning that we will bend our lives, and therefore our activity, thus our character will conform to what we treasure most. There is an inexorable progression. Guard your heart because your character is going to conform to what you treasure. It will do that because we will bend our lives. We will make the choices to go in that direction.

In these verses 22 and 23, He is saying that how clearly we perceive our choice of treasures will determine how well we will live our lives. It is a matter of quality. See, if your eyes are not too good, you can still function. You just do not function well. I am farsighted. I cannot thread a needle, but I can still drive an automobile like gangbusters, because I can see things at a distance really well. So I can get by in my life, but there are some things that are deficient.

I will try to make this as simple as I can. He is saying that even as the body has the eye with which to see and function, so does the heart. Jesus is intimating that discernment of our choice of treasure will be determined by the clearness of our spiritual vision. How we aim our life is going to be determined largely by our understanding of what life presents to us in relation to this world and the Kingdom of God.

The key word there is understanding. That is the “eye” of your heart—understanding, not knowledge. *Understanding*. People can have knowledge of God and it does them no good. They can have knowledge that there is a Creator. I have talked to people who do not go to church at all, but they believe that Saturday is the Sabbath. They have that knowledge. They have not the foggiest idea—they do not understand what it means to life. It makes no impact on their heart because they do not understand.

Do you understand that when God called you and me we already had a basic set of things that we believed? We believed that there was a Creator. Let us put it this way: We believed that God exists. We probably had a belief somewhere buried in our mind that the Bible was His word. There were certain things that we believed, but when God worked His miracle on our minds, He gave us understanding. Now we got it! And what happened? It meant something to you. You saw it, and because you saw it, you began to

change your life. You were “seeing” it differently from the way you ever saw truth before. That was the miracle that God did.

He has continued to give us more and more knowledge, but there has to be understanding of where it fits. If we do not understand where and how it fits and how it applies, we will never make any use of it. We may as well be blind. Jesus is saying here you not only have to have the right treasure, you have got to understand where it fits. I hope I am getting through, and that you appreciate what God has done. We can aid in this process mightily by yielding to Him. As we yield to Him, He will open up our understanding.

There are three things: knowledge, understanding, wisdom. Gaining knowledge is the easiest of the three. You cannot have wisdom until you first understand. Wisdom is the right practical application. You have got to know how to do it first, and that is what Jesus is talking about, here. We need practical understanding. Then we can see. We can make use of it.

There are brilliant men and women out there who have done awesome research in the Bible, and they have not the foggiest idea of how this stuff they are digging up applies. They can write these books and all kinds of technical manuals on what this word means and that word means, and so forth, and it took a simple man like Herbert Armstrong to put it together, because God opened up Mr. Armstrong's mind. And once He did that—did the same thing to you—the thing that impressed you most was how logical it was. That is the miracle—that God gave us understanding.

A lot of people actually carelessly think (and I know that I was in this) that Solomon asked God for wisdom. He did not. Only indirectly. He asked God for understanding. Let us look at this back in I Kings, chapter 3. (Mr. Armstrong said that for as long as he could remember in his life, he craved understanding. He wanted to know what made things tick, and of course that became the very means of salvation to you and me, because God triggered his mind to give him understanding in the most important things in life—why we were born.) In I Kings 3 is where Solomon asked God for this, and let us pick it up in verse 9. Here is the actual request.

I Kings 3:9-12 Give therefore your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and bad: for

who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for yourself long life; neither have asked for riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to your words: lo, I have given you a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like you before you, neither after you shall any arise like unto you.

It takes understanding to judge properly between good and evil, because understanding is the precursor to wisdom, which is the actual practical application. So the heart's eye is not mere knowledge. It is understanding how knowledge is to be applied to life. The heart's eye is understanding, which in turn leads to wisdom—the practical application.

That verse in Proverbs 29:17 says, “Without vision, the people perish.” If you do not understand what you are looking at, it can be the death of you. So God, in His revelation (that is more literally what that word vision means) says, “Without revelation, the people perish.” When God opened our minds, as it shows there in I Corinthians 2, He gave us an understanding of the application of things. A true understanding makes the spiritual vision clear, and so we can accurately say understanding is “the mind's eye.”

There are some other terms that might be used, and that is understanding, or the mind's eye, is practical judgment. It might be our world view, our perspective, or the way that we look at things. It is the prism through which we view life—both ours and others—and, brethren, it is in a person's understanding that his belief system is helped. If we do not understand what we are reading or what we are being taught, we cannot have faith in the Son of God. That is the work of God—that you believe in His Son.

We have to understand how things fit. Then we can trust. It is our understanding which guides, which directs, which lightens the way spiritually, morally, and ethically, so the person can keep his life pointed toward whatever it is that he treasures, and hopefully it will be the Kingdom of God.

It is in our understanding that we set our aim and intentions and determine how we are going to act or react in the circumstances of life, understanding what it is that we aim at, our position on what matters in life. If that light, our understanding, is darkened by an inordinate affection for material things (we are getting back to the context of Matthew 6 again) or it is obscured by sin, then that person's treasure is obviously in the world. That person is either ignorant of or simply does not understand the seriousness of the individual choices being made each day. He is far worse off than if he were physically blind, because judgment is on the Christian now.

We need to be asking God far more frequently than we do, just as Solomon did, that we have understanding so that we can discern what is the right thing to do so and that our spiritual vision will be sharpened. When it is sharpened, then we can function properly. We see things that are happening in their true perspective, sharp and clear. We might even say we see things more in a black and white way, in their stark reality, rather than being blurry and abstract.

By our mind's eye, we set the mark that we aim at, the place that we want to go, and this is what we keep in view. We direct our motions then accordingly. In Jesus' teaching of "if our eye be single," if we aim honestly and we fix the right ends and move rightly towards them, and if we aim purely and only at the glory of God and direct all entirely to Him, then that is proof that the eye is single—the spiritual eye.

Let me put it in another way. Paul put it this way. He said, "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). What he meant was that his entire existence was bound up in, was totally devoted to, serving Christ. If we are this way, then our actions will be pleasing to God, and we will feel much more confident and comfortable with ourselves in this relationship.

Turn with me to I John 3, in verses 18 through 22. Listen to what John said here.

I John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue. But in deed and in truth.

Light is a symbol of truth. Here will be the effect of this: for Paul, to live was Christ.

I John 3:19 Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

Do you want to be confident about your relationship with God—to know and know that you know?

I John 3:20 For if our heart condemn us [because we know that there are times that we do not live up to what we know], God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

John injects a bit of encouragement because he knows from his own life that he did not always live up to what he knew he was to do—what he understood that he was supposed to do, and so “If our heart condemn us...” That is, we feel guilty, our conscience is smitten, because we know we have not lived up to what God said, what we understand that we are to do, John is assuring us that God is greater than our heart, and that He will forgive us.

I John 3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Do you want to live positively? The eye has to be clear. The understanding has to be as sharp as it can possibly be, and then we follow through in submitting to God. Then our heart is what? It is clear. No guilty conscience. We are at peace. We are living with joy. This gets real interesting, because there is something else tied to this:

I John 3:22 And [Not only do we feel good about our relationship with God...] whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

What is it that pleases God? Without faith it is impossible to please Him. Trusting Him pleases Him. These things tie together into a neat package...all

tied to the treasure, the heart, how clearly we see things, and then we make the choice to yield to God. And because we do that, He gives us what we ask for. There is no father that can turn you down, and God is that way, and we feel good.

I John 3:23 And this is his commandment [this sounds just like John 6:28-29], that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

Interesting how these things tie together. The heart, treasure, the clear vision, understanding, which leads to the proper application, which leads to an abundant life, which leads to answered prayer—all bound up in faith. See, true joy is found in our spiritual nature, and the impossibility of combining the Kingdom of God with the world is shown unambiguously in the next verse which we will get to in the next sermon. So the sermon is over for today, and God willing, I will pick this up the next time I speak. To me these things are really exciting. In one sense, they are so basic. But on the other hand, they are the very essence of life: Heart. Treasure. Clear vision. Application.