

Do You See God? (Part Two)

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Forerunner, "Personal," February 2002

The Christian life is an educational process. God has designed it so that a person learns to judge and prioritize everything in terms of God and godliness. So we learn what is real versus what is illusion, truth versus lies, good versus evil, worthwhile versus worthless. It takes a lifetime of experiences—and sometimes multiple similar experiences—before we learn to make the proper judgments. Incredible as it seems, over a lifetime we can begin to judge matters as God does.

However, we must allow the evidence of good over evil and the like to enter our minds. Beyond that, we must also submit ourselves to the truth it reveals to us. If we reject that evidence, we have another responsibility: that of assuming guilt for denying God. In the end, it is far easier and far more rewarding to accept the evidence and submit to the truth.

Once we submit, we are required to begin living it; in practical fact, submitting to the truth *is* living it. Knowledge of what is true and godly is fine, but without being applied in one's life, it is practically useless in terms of God's judgment and eternal life. Jesus says that "he who *does* the will of My Father in heaven" is the one who will enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 7:21).

The Road to Emmaus

Luke 24 contains a noteworthy episode that occurred immediately after Christ's resurrection. It becomes even more interesting in light of a Christian living after his own symbolic resurrection, baptism. Once we commit our lives to God, we are supposed to "walk the walk." We are supposed to "walk with God" and "walk with Jesus Christ." The two men described in Luke 24 literally do this just hours after the resurrection:

Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself [the resurrected Christ] drew near and went with them. (Luke 24:13-15)

Luke emphasizes the fact that movement was taking place. Reading this centuries later, we can apply it to life itself. Our life is not a static process; our lives "move" from the moment of birth to the time God calls us and we are converted and then to our last breath. When we die, we stop "walking." However, from the time of our calling, we do not walk alone—God is with us. He leads and guides us by His Spirit. He convicts us of things that will be important for His spiritual creation and for our salvation. Once this process of conviction begins, we repent and are converted. God comes to live in us by means of His Spirit—then we really are "walking with Christ." We have Christ *in* us!

Are we walking with Him or not?

In Luke 24, He was literally with them, walking right beside them. And *they did not recognize Him* (verses 15-16)! Luke specifically says "their eyes were restrained." One might think that God had blinded their minds, but notice how the next verses read:

And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" (Luke 24:17-19)

Even someone who had associated with Christ for a fairly long period of time, possibly even the full length of His ministry, could fail to see. We have to realize that they did not expect to see. Humans see what they expect to see. People see what they want to see and are educated to see. Unless a person makes the effort to be discerning, to think consciously about other aspects of what he is looking at, it is likely that he will *not* see.

Christians must consciously process the truths that they receive from God as they are involved in the circumstances of their walk with Christ. We might be walking with Christ, and He is there walking beside us, but we do not see Him. This can happen if we fail to identify the circumstances that we are experiencing in our lives with Him. The spiritual, not perceived with the five senses, is often overlooked!

So, were these disciples "blinded"? One might think so but for what Jesus Himself says in verse 25: "Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!'"

The Greek word rendered "fool," *anoetos*, means "inconsiderate" in its original sense: They failed to consider or think! Another definition is "to reason improperly." It is very similar to the Hebrew *nabal* of the Old Testament. Jesus is telling them that they are not properly applying their minds. His rebuke also carries with it a moral reproach, describing "one who does not govern his mind."

When we read Christ's next rebuke, it becomes crystal clear that they simply did not *believe*! Even though they had been taught, they did not believe the things that appeared in the Old Testament describing the Messiah and His resurrection. They did not see the Christ, who stood right next to them, because they did not expect to see Him! Thus, Christ not only calls them "fools," suggesting that He expected them to be able to identify Him, but He also calls them "slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken," which intensifies His judgment that they were not spiritually alert. Thus, He feels it necessary to teach them the basics once again:

"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Luke 24:26-27)

In verse 21, the two men are in the midst of giving their explanation of the events of the preceding week to Christ. They say, "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." Their hope was really nothing more than a wish. It is significant that their response mentions nothing about having their trust in Him. The reason for this is that they were not using their faith or belief. A wide gulf separates "hoping" and "trusting." While hoping may consist of just a desire for something, trusting requires a person to believe confidently, make choices, and patiently endure.

When these two disciples finally saw Jesus, when they perceived who was with them, everything that they had experienced—including the crucifixion and resurrection—made sense (Luke 24:31-32). The point is this: If we see God working in our lives, then everything God is doing with us will begin to

"come together." It may not happen all at once as with these men, but if we can see God involved in the circumstances of our lives as we walk with Jesus Christ, then it will give shape and form to our lives in a way that we would never have otherwise! Things will make sense, and we will see them in their proper perspective.

God-Given Comprehension

Paul adds some essential understanding in I Corinthians 2:6-8:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

If mankind had seen Christ, if they had clearly identified with Him, the history of the world would be exceedingly different. They did not see because, as Paul writes here, they were not mature. *Mature*, in this context, means "converted." He contrasts those who are able to see and those who are not able to see. Those who are able to see are those who are spiritually mature.

Even though Christ quoted—and lived—the scriptures with which most of His audience were familiar, the people did not see God working through Him. So it has always been with God's servants. Christ was not the only one. Jesus Himself testifies that these people also "kill[ed] the prophets" (Matthew 23:34-37). It is unlikely that they would have killed the prophets if they clearly saw them as God's messengers. If they believed in God and were fearful of His authority and sovereignty over His creation, they would not have dared to do it! Nevertheless, it has always been this way: some see and some do not see.

Paul says in I Corinthians 2:7 that God's ministers "speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." This *mystery* is not a puzzle that is difficult to solve but "a secret impossible to penetrate." As the apostle goes on to say in succeeding verses, the world is not "all there" upstairs because they do not have God's Spirit to help them penetrate the secret. Without this vital ingredient, it is no wonder that it accepts its own and rejects the truths of God.

A Necessity

Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:9, "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'" Many in the world believe that the things of God are "too great" for mere humans to comprehend. We really cannot "get it" or see it. Yet, the truth is so simple to those whose eyes are open that a child can understand. The carnal mind, however, is so blinded by traditions and habits of thinking that even Christians tend to reject the things of God—even though God has converted us.

The effect of this is something like the story about the three blind Indians who were led up to an elephant. Each man touched a different part of the great beast. One held the elephant's trunk, and when asked what it was, he said, "This is a snake." The second man, holding the elephant's tail, said, "This is a rope." The third man, feeling the elephant's leg, said, "This is a tree."

This is analogous to what happens in the world. The world can perceive bits and pieces of the truth, but they cannot put it all together and see the glory of God in its whole. They cannot see God as an intrinsic—absolutely necessary—part of a person's life. They cannot see how necessary the spiritual is! As Herbert Armstrong said so often, it is the missing dimension.

If it is seen and if it is understood, then life begins to make sense. We begin to be able to see ourselves—a single, unique individual—as a part of the whole, the awesome plan and purpose that God is working out! Then, being able to see God gives direction to our life. So our eyes have seen and our ears have heard, and "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" has entered into our hearts.

. . . God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in Him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (I Corinthians 2: 10-12)

These three verses prove that we are predisposed by God's calling to see Him. He predisposes us not only to know His truth, but to know who His servants are, as well. So we can know the things of God. We may not know them perfectly, but what we know is a great source of comfort, security, hope, and direction.

God's Perspective

Paul continues in I Corinthians 2:13-15:

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

True wisdom is the result of human reason coupled with revelation. Yet, even true wisdom will result only if a person believes what God says. Only then does a person have the opportunity to see God. He is hidden from those who put their faith in human wisdom.

Natural in this context does not mean "evil." It simply refers to one whose horizons are bounded by the things of natural life, by "the around and the about." Such a person is not equipped to discern the activities of God. But a person with the Holy Spirit can examine God's activities and make judgments based on them. Therefore, in his process of judgment, God comes into the picture. When the Spirit of God comes into a person's life, the basis of his judgment ***should change*** ! This occurs, not because the person is any "greater" or "better," but because the Spirit of God equips him to see and to use godly wisdom. Now he can judge all things from God's perspective. This indeed is our responsibility!

Because God has called us, we should see God so clearly and know His greatness so intimately that we can live in the expectation that something great can happen at any moment to those who are receptive. The God who raised up Jesus is equal to any occasion—any possibility! Is anything too hard for Him? Certainly not! He throws that challenge out to man—to those who truly see Him.

Daniel's Three Friends

A familiar episode in Daniel 3 can be approached from this point of view. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego are three Jewish captives in the land of Babylon. Because they showed such promise, the Babylonian government educated them and put them to work. However, their selection by the Babylonian government put them in peril because Nebuchadnezzar, in his vanity, made an image to his god and erected it on the plain of Dura. He commanded everybody to bow down to it at the sound of the musical tone. Every citizen of Babylon had to prostrate himself before Nebuchadnezzar's god.

And everyone did—except for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. They must have stood out like a sore thumb! Everybody else was down on their knees or on their belly groveling in the dirt, but they remained upright. They could not hide. Where could they run?

Maybe Nebuchadnezzar did not witness it the first time it occurred, but plenty of witnesses came to him and testified of what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had not done. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar ordered a command performance before him. "All right, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Let's see how brave and courageous you are when you have to do it right before me," said this great Oriental potentate, surrounded by his police force and all the accusers of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. We can imagine a roaring furnace prominent in the background.

In spite of all the evidence that they had around them—Nebuchadnezzar, his warriors, the accusers, the roaring fire—did these three Jewish men see God? Yes, though not with their physical eyes.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter [that is, they would not go into any long, detailed explanation]. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But, if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury. . . .
(Daniel 3:16-19)

They could see the rage in his face, but they also saw God. Where did their powerful conviction come? This kind of conviction does not arise "on command," at the spur of the moment. It is the product of the demonstration of God in the lives of these three young men before this time, before their lives were on the line. Their faith had grown and matured over a period of time.

God is always the same. What God says through Paul in I Corinthians 10:13 applied to them just as it applies to us. God knew what they could endure. They also knew that He would provide a "way of escape." Because of this, they told the king, despite his threats, "Even if God does not choose to protect us, we still are not going to bow down to your image."

Have we ever considered why more "mighty deliverances" do not occur to us? It is because *we spend so little time fellowshiping with God that we do not see Him as an immediate and vitally important part of our lives*. As a result, the physical "evidence" we see around us overwhelms us.

"Impossible" Situations

Jeremiah 25:15-38 records a severe test that Jeremiah was put through. God tells him to take a cup of wine, symbolic of God's wrath, to the nations surrounding Judah. Though the wine was just a symbol, the job he had to do was not. In a way, it parallels the work God has given the end-time church.

By God's command, Jeremiah had to go from nation to nation, to all the enemies of Judah. One by one, he was to present to their rulers this cup of wine and make them drink it. God tells Jeremiah that, if they refused, "You will make them drink it!" God must have given him the force of personality—or whatever he needed—to make those men take that cup and to drink the wine. Last of all, the prophet was to take it to the king of Sheshach, a code name for Babylon.

Was there a parallel in the work of Herbert W. Armstrong? Did we see God in his work? Did he go from nation to nation and tell them what would occur in the future? Last of all, will the church go to Babylon, and make its rulers to drink of that cup?

There are so many examples in the Bible of people who saw God in seemingly impossible situations. In like manner, each potential child of God is or will be called on to include God in his thinking, to see things from His perspective, to see Him in every aspect of life. Then, throughout our lives from God's calling on, we are to slowly but surely build our strength, confidence, and faith in God until we see Him in everything!

We can see God as David did. Though a mere lad, apparently, only he—out of all Israel, out of all of the fighting men—saw God. Everyone else saw the Philistine army and Goliath. David's kind of faith—his spiritual sight or insight—occurred because he spent long hours out with sheep meditating on the creation of God, seeing His power and divine nature revealed in it. It came about as the result of David knowing the scriptures and what had happened in former times, knowing that God had been working with the people of Israel, knowing that God had demonstrated His interest, His concern, His purpose for Israel. David believed those things, and when push came to shove, David saw God!

"Now My Eye Sees You"

Job is another example of a man of God who saw Him, though it took great tragedy and God's own voice to make the picture clear:

Then Job answered the Lord and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

This is the conclusion, the climax, of his long and detailed story. Now Job can see God. From the context, properly seeing God involves getting the self out of the way! As long as self was in his line of sight, Job judged God by his own perspective. Remember, we see what we want to see, what we are educated to see. So Job saw his own wisdom, his own works, and they blocked his view of God in His greatness. The carnal mind is trained to do this.

It takes great determination, discipline in study and in prayer, and meditation to break oneself of that natural, carnal mode of thinking. Even when we succeed, we have to understand that our vision of God still has to be constantly replenished—"day by day," Paul says (II Corinthians 4:16)—and upgraded, refocused, exercised, as it were, in the truth.

Job's case is particularly interesting. Job thought he knew God well, but he was painfully unaware that there was still much that he did not know. During his sufferings, he threw a great many direct challenges at God in an effort either to justify himself or to understand why he was going through this trial. Yet, God never directly answered any of Job's challenges! Instead, beginning in chapter 38, He leads Job to see his own insignificance in light of God's greatness. Most people do not realize that in the entire book Job never repents of sin. Sin is not the issue! The issue is that, despite Job's extensive knowledge of God, he did not see Him as all-powerful! He did realize that God alone puts down evil and brings to pass all of His holy will.

We can tell the real issue in the book of Job by what God says in chapters 38-41. God makes two speeches. It is not Job's self-righteousness—certainly apparent—that God addresses, but his questioning of God's justice in the governance of His creation.

When Job opens his mouth to speak in Job 42:1-6, it is to tell God that he got the point: ***God's purpose is all that counts*** ! In addition, since He is God, He can bring it to pass. God has the right, the will, and the loving nature to do anything He pleases to anybody at any time—and good will result.

Do we believe that? A caution, however: A man as spiritually mature as Job did not—until the end of the book.

God's Counsel Stands

We would do well to consider Isaiah 46:8-10:

Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors.
Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure."

These three verses contain a general principle in which God challenges us to consider, to compare, all of the material idols, which are so easily seen, to Him. There is, really, no comparison.

Joshua says at the end of his life:

Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that ***not one thing has failed*** of all the good things which the Lord your

God spoke concerning you. *All have come to pass for you; and not one word of them has failed* . (Joshua 23:14)

"Remember" is an important word within true, spiritual religion. Remembering brings back to mind what has happened in the past as evidence of what God can and will do. These verses in Isaiah say we must remember that God's counsel stands; when He says something, it is so. It happens. God gives plenty of evidence to demonstrate that *He can be trusted*. Seeing God and having faith is the result of recalling that God has demonstrated both Himself and His purpose in "the former things."

Isaiah 46:9 says, "Remember the former things." This is what David did. This is what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego did. We too have to *remember*. However, our focus, our spiritual insight, is greatly built and reinforced through obedience to His counsel in the present and by seeing from one's own experience that His will and purpose truly do stand. Once that occurs, we can *see* God!