



Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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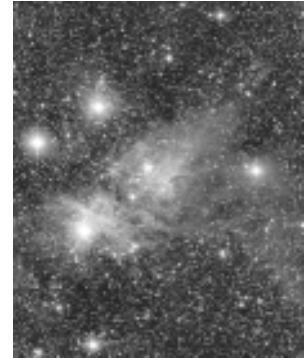
DO YOU SEE
GOD?

January 2002 Contents

Volume 11, Number 1

- 3 PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH
Do You See God? (Part One)
- 7 A READY ANSWER:
A Time to Throw Away
—David F. Maas
- 10 PROPHECY WATCH:
Globalism (Part Seven)
—Charles Whitaker
- 16 *Christian Myopia*
—Rod Keesee
- 19 WORLD WATCH
—David C. Grabbe
- 20 BIBLE STUDY
Second Tithe
—Martin G. Collins

About Our Cover



Psalm 19 begins, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” It is easy to see God’s hand in awesome sights like this view of the Chamaeleon Nebula. But do we see God closer to home—in world events, in the church, in our own lives? Just how good is our spiritual sight? **(Reuters)**

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DO YOU SEE GOD?

Part One

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. (verses 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. (verses 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

Psalm 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.

Continued on page 9

“Be Ready Always To Give An Answer” – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

A Ready Answer

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us . . .”

—Hebrews 12:1

A Time to Throw Away

My parents had barely reached their teenage years when the Great Depression ravaged the country. Characteristic of so many individuals who had lived through the Depression, they acquired the pack-rat habit of saving things, sentimentalizing clutter, fearful of throwing anything away because it might prove valuable someday. Dad built a four-car garage back on the farm, but eventually no cars could be parked in this structure because it was full of accumulated things.

Though I never experienced the Great Depression firsthand, I, too,

have picked up the “Great Depression” mentality. My garage is stashed (much to my wife’s chagrin) with banker’s boxes full of papers, books, and things—all waiting to be sorted, categorized, and, yes, thrown away!

Solomon emphasizes in Ecclesiastes 3:1, 6 that there is a time to “let go”: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: . . . A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away.” Some things are worthy of treasuring for the rest of our lives, while other things belong in the dumpster.

In his book, *Weight Loss for the*

Mind, Stuart Wilde suggests that “letting go” is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks for a human being. He suggests that we instinctively “hang on to our family connections, to the certificate we got at school, to our money, we embrace and hang on to our children [sometimes attempting to micromanage their lives into adulthood], we lock our car and hang on to it.” People may hang onto books, magazines, cassettes, records, shoes, egg cartons, plastic jugs, bottles, reusable cans, etc. If we keep these items long enough, we sentimentalize them, affectionately calling them antiques.

Dragging Our Trap

Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* compares our accumulated belongings to traps we carry around, suggesting

it is the same as if all these traps were buckled to a man’s belt, and he could not move over the rough country where our lines are cast without dragging them—dragging his trap. He was a lucky fox that left his tail in the trap. The muskrat will gnaw his third leg off to be free. No wonder man has lost his elasticity.

The difficulty we have in freeing ourselves from physical clutter metaphorically parallels our difficulties getting rid of spiritual clutter. God’s Word indicates, however, that we must make a full-fledged effort to rid ourselves of excess baggage. Notice Hebrews 12:1:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. . . .

Perennial and chronic sin constitutes the unwanted weight or obesity that we desperately desire to shed. This accumulative set of reinforced bad habits and transgressions the apostle Paul identifies as the “old man.” He admonishes that we ought to slough off the “old man” like an accumu-

lated mass of dead skin cells or an old discarded garment: “. . . that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22).

Paul gets more specific as he identifies particular obnoxious traits and qualities found in the old man—or our comfortable old carnal selves:

But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds. . . . (Colossians 3:8-9)

Our elder brother Jesus Christ is more emphatic about excising habits and behaviors that may eventually take our spiritual lives:

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

Parallel warnings appear also in Matthew 18:8-9 and Mark 9:43, 45. Some people have failed to understand on the spiritual intent of this verse by severing the physical limbs or appendages from their bodies. The motivation for sin emanates from the deep recesses of the cerebral cortex, in the heart or mind of an individual (Matthew 15:18-19; Mark 7:20-21). If we would literally excise that portion of our anatomy, we would instantly die.

Consequently, the cutting, the excising, and the pruning Christ speaks of must be of thoughts, behaviors, habits, words, and deeds rather than limbs and organs. These body parts are only extensions and tools of the central nervous system, which itself is a servant of the mind.

Actually to amputate an evil thought or impulse is far more diffi-

cult than amputating a limb or excising a malignant tumor. Our thoughts and behaviors make up our self-image, which is highly resistant to change—even when the thoughts, words, and behaviors are self-destructive.

Dr. William V. Haney in his *Communication and Organizational Behavior* illustrates that people who hold negative or dysfunctional self-images tenaciously hold onto them, feeling their very “identities” to be at stake:

A man, for example, may regard himself as incompetent and worthless. He may feel that he is doing his job poorly in spite of favorable appraisals by the company. As long as he has these feelings about himself, he must deny any experiences which would not seem to fit this self-picture, in this case any that might indicate to him that he is competent. It is so necessary for him to maintain this self-picture that he is *threatened* by anything which would attempt to change it.

. . . This is why direct attempts to change this individual or change his self-picture are particularly threatening. He is forced to defend himself or to completely deny the experience. This denial of experience and defense of self-picture tend to bring on rigidity of behavior and create difficulties in personal adjustment. (3rd Edition, 1973, p. 88)

To hang on to this negative self-image rather than to conform to God’s image (Romans 8:29) means to resurrect and hang onto the old man—with its obnoxious habits and behavior patterns. Some of these behavior patterns we may have reinforced so thoroughly that it has become part of us, somewhat like individuals who carry around benign or malignant tumors, accepting them as part of themselves, rather than a hideous and life-threatening alien growth.

A number of years ago explorer John Goddard brought before the Ambassador College student body a jar containing a parasitic tape worm which physicians had extracted from

the extremities of his intestinal tract. Jokingly he told the students, “on cold evenings out in the wilderness, it was a comfort to know that ‘Charlie’ was there with me.”

Pruning for Growth

Perhaps some of us have sentimentalized our faults and sinful behavior, considering them, annoying as they are, a part of us. We need to wake up and realize that these faults are incrementally taking our eternal life as we allow them to grow in our minds, crowding out space. For godly behaviors to be grafted in, pruning, purging, and excising must take place continually. Even as we begin having success in changing our habits and bearing fruit, God demands that we be pruned further: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2).

Militant environmentalists often object to the harvesting of timber on public lands, not realizing that natural laws engineered by Almighty God periodically thin out excess growth by fire or disease. Forest rangers, anticipating these natural cycles, spray paint red X’s on trees to mark them to facilitate clearing out the unproductive vegetation.

We dare not sentimentalize those unproductive branches that God removes, nor should we sentimentalize those destructive carnal habit patterns that are blocking the transmission of God’s Holy Spirit. As Jude so picturesquely puts it, we must throw these evil behaviors and attitudes away, “hating even the garment defiled by the flesh” (Jude 23).

Unfortunately, we all have the natural tendency to cling to what is familiar, even if it proves detrimental to us. Like those who have adopted the Depression mentality, we fearfully and tenaciously cling to self-defeating and destructive behaviors. Many individuals have collected injustices and grudges throughout the years, nursing them and keeping them alive long after the activating event has ceased. Spouses who have gone through an ugly divorce carry these malignancies to the grave after hav-

ing infected their offspring with the same malignancy.

Some of the grudges and hatreds which ethnic groups bear toward one another are hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years old. God deplores a hatred that is nursed, reinforced, and embraced long after the activating event has ceased. Such an abiding hatred is described in Amos 2:1-2:

Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth; Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting and trumpet sound.'

Like the current hatred held by certain factions in the Middle East, Moab's hatred was tenacious, abiding, and clinging. He just refused to let go, and God, in turn, promised heavy retribution in judgment.

In his *Psycho Cybernetics*, plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz insists:

carrying a grudge against someone or against life can bring on the old age stoop, just as much as carrying a heavy weight would. People with emotional scars, grudges, and the like are living in the past, which is characteristic of [many] old people.

Robert Frost masterfully illustrates in his poem "Home Burial" how a husband, tenaciously and fearfully hanging onto his self-destructive

pride, (an integral part of the old man) is unable to reconcile with his estranged wife. The normal-type lines represent attempts at humble reconciliation and the italicized lines depict the ugly marriage-destroying pride coming to the surface:

My words are nearly always
an offense.

I don't know how to speak of
anything
so as to please you. But I
might be taught

I should suppose. *I can't say I
see how.*

*A man must partly give up
being a man
with womenfolk.* We could
have some arrangement
by which I'd bind myself to
keep hands off

anything special you're a-mind
to name.

*Though I don't like such
things twixt those that love.*

. . . Tell me about it if it's
something human.

Let me into your grief. I'm not
so much

like other folks as your
standing there
apart would make me out.

Give me my chance.

*I do think, though, you overdo
it a little.*

Like the turbulence of meteorological high and low pressure cells, the vacillation between humility and pride causes a turbulence in human relations and in relations between ourselves and God. We must excise, prune, eradicate, and destroy the use-

less trait of pride as we in humility practice "submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21; see also I Peter 5:5; Philippians 2:3).

Willing to Forgive

Another particular heavy weight we drag around is our inability to forgive others even though our Savior and Elder Brother admonishes us in the model prayer, "And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us" (Luke 11:4; see also Matthew 6:12). To be unwilling to forgive others puts us in the same situation as the wicked servant in Matthew 18:32-34, who had great debts forgiven him but would not forgive others of their relatively meager debts. Contingent upon God's removing the burden of guilt from us is our obligation to reconcile with our brother (Matthew 5:24).

So we see that a major key to overcoming is to "let go" of our sins, confessing them to God, who forgives them (I John 1:9), and throwing them away. Notice Proverbs 28:13: "He who covers his sins [hangs on to them, protects them, stashes them away] will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes [gets rid of] them will have mercy."

Whether we depict our sins as leavening, dead branches, heavy weights, benign or malignant tumors, pet tapeworms, or boxes of sentimentalized clutter, we desperately need to follow Herbert W. Armstrong's vital mandate of simplifying our lives. Let's get rid of all excess weight and begin to throw things away!

—David F. Maas

Continued from page 6

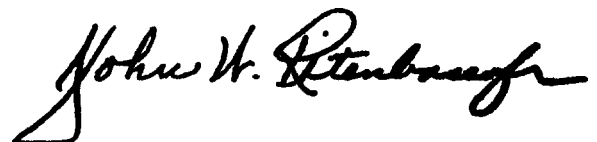
Do You See God?

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.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

In Christian love,



GLOBALISM

Part Seven: The Countertide

Just like a century ago, the march of global capitalism appears irresistible.¹ In 1900, the first age of globalization was in its stride, American and British interests joining to create the biggest economy the world had ever seen. In relative terms, it was every bit as interdependent (though perhaps not as integrated) as today's global economy.² However, irresistible, unstoppable it was not! For, by that same date, 1900, vast countervailing forces were militating against the British-led global economic initiative. As we saw in an earlier article, the first age of globalism died with the archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Bosnia, 1914—violently, surprisingly, and suddenly.

Will history repeat itself? As strong and vigorous as it appears on the surface, is today's globalism really irresistible, "a great tide, inexorably wearing away the established order of things" as former-President Bill Clinton avers?³ Or, are countervailing forces arising to destroy its promise of peace and prosperity? Is it doomed to die in unbelievable violence, as did its predecessor some 85 years ago?

Notwithstanding the impression one gains by perusing the globalists' glitzy web site, www.theGlobalist.com, globalization may not be coming up roses. The Aga Khan perceives "a deep and vigorous countertide, . . . a 'new tribalism,'" shaping our world.⁴ What is the nature of this countertide, this "new tribalism?"

First, we would do well not to underestimate the scope and strength of this countertide. Ironically, the only thing that is *global* about it is its range; tribalism is "hitting the beaches" everywhere.

From the Balkans to the Horn of Africa, from the southern tier of the former Soviet Union to western China, from Indonesia to Mindanao in the Philippines, *extremist tribalism* is on the rise.⁵

. . . [A]ll over the world, we see a kind of reversion to tribalism. . . .

We see it in Russia, in Yugoslavia, in Canada, in the United States. . . . What is it about all this globalization of communication that is making people return to more—to smaller units of identity?⁶

The breadth of tribalism imparts to it a strength rivaling that of globalism. One analyst, citing the "steady uptick in violent conflicts from Africa to Europe," suggests that "endless debates about globalization may turn out to be a mere sideshow"⁷ to the main attraction of fragmenting, squabbling



A. Raffaele Cirriello

The continuing wars in Afghanistan are in reality—apart from their religious overtones—tribal conflicts. The country is divided into several regions in which one tribe or another is dominant.

prophecy watch

From the Balkans to the Horn of Africa, from the southern tier of the former Soviet Union to western China, from Indonesia to Mindanao in the Philippines, extremist tribalism is on the rise.

—Thomas M. Franck

Director, Center for International Studies, New York University School of Law

Countertide Rolls In



Muslims offer prayers at the ruins of Jami Mosque for end-of-Ramadan celebrations in New Delhi, India. The India-Pakistan conflict is also an ethnic war with a religious element that has expanded to international proportions.

states—and the inevitable wars between them.

The Nature of Tribalism

The dictionary definition of *tribalism* is “a strong feeling of identity with and loyalty to one’s tribe or group.”⁸ Note the words *tribe* and *group*. Tribalism, distinct from nationalism, does not connect one with the nation, but with some sub-national unit—an ethnic

group or tribe or clan. The tidal forces of tribalism *fragment* empires into nations and nations into tribes.

Looked at this way, tribalism is a movement wherein the individual relates not so much to the norms (often vaguely articulated) established by the global mainstream as to the values (usually well-defined) of a small ethnic or religious group. Certainly, one given to tribalism feels no ties to the international community. The Islamist (as distinct from the more mainstream Islamic) mores of Afghanistan’s Taliban have

nothing in common with the ideologies of the cosmopolitan bureaucrats regulating life in the European Union.

To indicate the direction in which tribalism can lead, note this chilling statement made by a senior Indian official. This was his official reaction to President Clinton’s statement that India, in detonating a nuclear weapon, was not acting responsibly in the global community:

It would be a great error to assume that simply advocating the new mantras of globalization and the market makes national security subservient to global trade. The 21st century will *not* be a century of trade. The world still has to address the unfinished agenda of the centuries.⁹

The Indian official does not say exactly what this “unfinished agenda” is, but odds are more than 50-50 that it has something to do with the Hindu/Muslim conflict—it has something to do with Pakistan. There is little that would pass for good will between India and Pakistan these days, not much free trade, no open border. Their feud over Kashmir could erupt into war, even nuclear war, at any time.

Sightings of the Countertide

A review of current literature indicates the scope and vitality of the

prophecy watch

anti-globalism tide. In case after case, we see a force pushing for a return to smaller units, the dissolution of large economic and political entities. Let us start by putting globalism in perspective. Notice the many powerful forces lined up against globalization.

Like any powerful movement for change, globalization encounters resistance—in America from religious fundamentalists, labor unions and their allies; abroad from anti-Americanists; everywhere from cultural traditionalists.¹⁰

This popular resistance to globalism spawned the demonstrations against the World Trade Organization's meeting in Seattle during the summer of 1999. The protestors' philosophical backdrop is best spelled out in a book whose very title suggests a return to small units: *The Case Against the Global Economy and for a Turn Toward the Local*.¹¹ These people, wanting to return to a local economy, "see globalization as a process that is destroying the earth, perpetrating vast injustices, and being imposed by a small circle of powerful corporate leaders."¹²

The danger of this resistance lies in the depths of its roots. Average John Doe American citizen, committed to nation, mother, and apple pie, is seeing less eye-to-eye with his leadership with every passing day. Such a breach between citizenry and elite portends distressing political sickness.

[E]conomic globalization is creating a growing gap between denationalized elites and nationalist publics.... The consequences . . . are nationalist, illiberal and populist reactions to globalization. The United States is not immune to these trends. . . . American wealth and power are at their peak. The national unity, economic equity and cultural integrity of America are not. In the broadest sense, American national identity is under challenge from a multiculturalism that subverts it from below and

a cosmopolitanism that erodes it from above. Patriotism is passé among large sectors of American elites.¹³

That may be. Yet, for the average citizen, the problem is less one of outlook as it is one of pocketbook. That is why "first Ross Perot, then Patrick Buchanan tapped into the domestic discontent of blue-collar workers spurned by a Clinton administration focused on free trade and the middle class."¹⁴ So prevalent is tribalism that some commentators feel the triumphalism of globalist economists will eventually fall quiet in the face of a backlash generated by ever-widening income disparities.¹⁵ Inarguably, globalization is *increasing* the income gap between rich and poor, not narrowing it, a phenomenon that manifests itself in America as well as in the world at large. In the

United States, "income inequality . . . is increasing, not only because of gains at the top, but more disturbingly, because of losses at the bottom."¹⁶ Politically, the consequence has been a

[p]opular backlash against globalization [that] has produced a political stalemate on most international economic issues. As a result, the president has had no effective authority to negotiate new trade agreements since 1994. Legislation to replenish the IMF languished for a year in the midst of the Asian crisis. . . .¹⁷

The figures suggest that globalization shows every sign of creating a stratified class structure in America, where Americans are increasingly unable to enjoy the social mobility they have in



Police contain rioters protesting the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle, Washington, in 1999. Though this hardly appears to be a form of tribalism, it is certainly a backlash against globalism and an effort to break up massive corporate structures into smaller, more local units.

Harley Scifres

the past. The globalized economy seems to be engendering two classes of citizens, those who *get* from the global economy and those who *give* to support it.

Former secretary of labor Robert Reich, among others, has pointed out that America is developing into two societies—not so much black and white but cosmopolitan versus national, or between those who have directly, even extravagantly, reaped the benefits in recent years from the new globalized economy and those who have paid its price in terms of military service, endangered jobs, and repressed wages. The former may represent 15 to 25 percent of the population. . . . Facing them are the vast majority of citizens who will no doubt be asked to pay the price of their country's policy of hegemony.¹⁸

The United States is not alone. The widening gap between rich and poor is an *international* phenomenon.

The ratio of average income of the richest country in the world to that of the poorest has risen from about 9 to 1 at the end of the nineteenth century to at least 60 to 1 today. That is, the average family in the United States is 60 times richer than the average family in Ethiopia. . . . Ironically, inequality is growing at a time when the triumph of democracy and open markets was supposed to usher in a new age of freedom and opportunity. *In fact, both developments seem to be having the opposite effect.*¹⁹

The remedies sought by many of the world's peoples may not be to America's liking.

Most recently, a United Nations study suggests that while globalization may benefit the United States—the annual sales of General Motors, we learn,

are greater than the gross domestic products of Thailand or Norway, while Ford generates more income than Saudi Arabia—much of the world is being left behind. *And so, if*



Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, speaks out against the onslaught of globalism, particularly of the American variety.

*the debate was once about whether America was headed for the skids, it is now about whether globalization will simply trigger an anti-American backlash.*²⁰

This is not a postured gloom-and-doom pronouncement; the backlash is not the figment of fertile imaginations any more than the Euro is, or the proposed Asian Monetary Fund. These are in fact manifestations of trading blocks' determination to go it on their own, marginalizing the United States. Unless this trend is reversed soon, the world will witness "severe international conflicts and the disintegration of global economic links."²¹

Cultural traditionalists are yet another group ever against globalism. Cultural traditionalists urge that local policies, values, and mores (which are, incidentally, usually highly pagan) should take precedence over the mainstream norms of international law. An example of cultural traditionalism in America is a religious group that claims the right of polygamy, in spite of federal and state laws reflecting mainstream monogamous values. In an international context, a current example is Afghanistan's Taliban,

religious leaders who claim the Koran gives Afghanistan the right to trade children as slaves, again against all international norms.

Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's prime minister and spokesman for anti-Americanism of any hue, issues this bitterly sardonic complaint against globalization.

[W]hat is from the West is universal. Other values and cultures are superfluous and unnecessary. If they remain, there will be a clash of civilizations. To avoid this there should be only one civilization in the world. Thus the globalized world will be totally uniform. Variety is equal to being intransigent and must therefore be eliminated.²²

Finally, the fragmentation of the alliance between North America and Europe is another example of the range of tribalism. One observer perceives better than many in God's church the current state of the gradual dissolution of this Alliance since the end of the Cold War.

[N]o one, and certainly no American, should underestimate the extent to which Eurofederalism is inspired by *a resentment of the power and success of the United States—and, as some would have it, the "angle-Saxons"*—over the last fifty years. . . . [France's late



Francois Mitterrand, late president of France, considered his country to be at war with America and her "voracious" appetite for world power.

president Francois Mitterrand commented that] “France does not know it, but we are at war with America. Yes, a permanent war, a vital war, an economic war, a war without death. Yes, they are very hard the Americans, they are voracious, they want undivided power over the world.”²³

If France is at war with America, then the EU is at war with England, which is fragmenting as a result. In England, the “Union Jack” is all but dead, as Great Britain’s component parts decouple more and more:

Today, few, especially in the United States, realize that a great nation has already ceased to exist, and that its fragments are about to be rearranged in an utterly different form. However, in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland the first shock of dissolution has already passed. . . . The process of disintegration is likely to accelerate in the near future.²⁴

The tide of tribalism is a force of disintegration, fragmentation, and dissolution. That force, powerful and ubiquitous, threatens the cohesion globalists seek to build.

Israel’s Rebellion by Tribalism

The Old Testament is a good case-study of God’s view of, and reaction to, tribalism—identifying with the tribe at the *expense* of the nation.

Genesis 49 records Jacob’s prophecy concerning his sons’ descendants. The patriarch clearly based his comments on his knowledge of their individual *distinctiveness*. History shows, just as clearly, that God never intended to submerge that distinctiveness, to obscure or obliterate the personality traits that even today make the nations of modern-day Israel different from each other. Quite the contrary, from the very beginning, He endeavored to maintain their tribal identity.

- In the wilderness trek, He allocated each tribe a distinct area in the camp (Numbers 2:1-34).

- He dedicated each tribe its specific place in the march (Numbers 10:11-28).

- Working through Joshua, He allocated Israel’s inheritance, the land, by tribe (Joshua 13-22).

- He even required marriages within tribes when ones with mates outside of the tribe could result in the loss of tribal inheritance (Numbers 36:6-7).

God had no intention of sublimating the identity of each tribe. He *organized* Israel by tribe, and He will continue to do so into perpetuity, as Revelation 7:5-8 indicates. The twelve gates of the New Jerusalem will bear “the names of the twelve tribes of children of Israel” (Revelation 21:12).

With this work of tribal perpetuation, however, God designed a rich counterpoint: He sought all the while to make Israel into a unified nation, which, like America in some respects, would be *one nation melded of its distinctive parts*. The appellative “children of Israel” well expresses this counterpoint, for it calls attention to the various children (plural) of one person (Israel).

God recognizes each individual tribe and respects its identity, but treats the various tribes as one nation. Referring to the Exodus, Moses asks the people, “Did God ever . . . take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation?” (Deuteronomy 4:34; see also, verses 6-8). It is interesting to note that, to protect the integrity of the nation, God commanded that Israel not marry Gentiles (see Exodus 34:13-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-3). God commanded marriage within Israel to ensure the continued identity of the nation.

As the rebellion of Korah indicates (Numbers 16), God did not take kindly to people’s attempts to return to tribalism—to dissociate themselves from the nation God was building

through Moses and to revert to the tribe as the basic political unit. God treated Korah’s actions, and those of his confederates, as rebellion.

Dathan, Abiram, and On were all of the tribe of Reuben (verse 1). They probably allied themselves with a disaffected Levite, Korah, to fulfill what they defined as their destiny. After all, they must have reasoned, Reuben deserved a degree of deference as the firstborn, did he not? Dathan and his cronies probably wanted to ensure that their tribe did not become eclipsed by Levi (the tribe of Moses and Aaron) or by Judah. The Reubenites may have felt threatened by the marriage of Aaron (of the tribe of Levi) to Elisheba (Exodus 6:23). She was the daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, and therefore of the preeminent family of Judah (Numbers 10:14). The Reubenites perhaps felt more marginalized every day, as the locus of power and status seemed to shift to Levi and Judah. Their thinking was purely *tribal*, not national. It was not consonant with God’s thinking at all.

God’s emphasis on the nationhood of Israel did not abate with the end of the theocracy and the commencement of the monarchy. David asks God in prayer, “Who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people . . . ?” (II Samuel 7:23). At Solomon’s death, the united kingdom split into two parts, basically along tribal lines. The incident portrays tribalism at its worst:

What portion have we in David?
We have no inheritance in the son
of Jesse.

To your tents, O Israel!
Now, see to your own house,
O David!
(I Kings 12:16)

In the revolt of Israel from Solomon’s son Rehoboam, the ten northern tribes displayed their total rejection of the leadership of Judah, the scepter tribe (Genesis 49:10). This cleavage between Israel and Judah exists to this day.

By the period of the late monarchy, God places little emphasis on

the tribes *as tribes*. The prophets address Israel and Judah as nations: “Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity” (Isaiah 1:4; see also Jeremiah 2:11).

In the church era, God remains committed to create of the twelve tribes one nation—Israel. As Paul writes, the Israel of his day remained “beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28). Though He eventually will disperse His people “among all nations” because of their sins, God remains committed to regathering them, reconstituting them under Him as a *single* nation. God speaks through Ezekiel:

As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on

it: “For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.” Then take another stick and write on it, “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.” Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand. . . . Then say to [the children of Israel], “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be

king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.’” (Ezekiel 37:16-17, 21-22)

This is God’s vision of Israel: *One nation*—organized forever around the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, one gate for each tribe.

Today, God’s work of integration continues apace, only on economic and political levels in the context of this “present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). Next month, we will delve into the reasons *why* globalism is so important to Him, *how* He is using it to ready Israel to become eventually a single nation under Him.

—Charles Whitaker

Endnotes

¹ G. J. Ikenberry, “Don’t Panic: How Secure Is Globalization’s Future?” *Foreign Affairs*, May 2000, p. 145. Mr. Ikenberry’s comments are part of his review of Robert Gilpin’s book *The Challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st Century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Kenneth Waltz (“Globalization and American Power,” *The National Interest*, Spring 2000) makes the same point: “Globalizers, to be sure, do not claim that globalization is complete, only that the process is irreversible” (p. 49).

² See Kenneth Waltz, “Globalization and American Power,” *The National Interest*, Spring 2000, p. 48. Mr. Waltz continues:

Finding that the level of [economic] interdependence in 1999 approximately equals that of 1920 is hardly surprising. What is true of trade also holds for capital flows, again as a percentage of GDP. . . . Despite today’s ease of communications, financial markets in 1900 were at least as integrated as they are now.

Waltz is a research associate of the Institute of War and Peace Studies and adjunct professor at Columbia University.

³ As quoted by Lawrence F. Kaplan, “A Bridge Too Far,” *National Interest*, Fall 1999, p. 135. Andrew J. Bacevich (“Policing Utopia: The Military Imperatives of Globalization,” *The National Interest*, Summer 1999) quotes Sandy Berger, Mr. Clinton’s national security adviser, as saying, “We cannot turn back the tides of globalization any more that King Knute [sic] could turn back the tides” (p. 9).

⁴ The Aga Khan, as quoted by Yahya Sadowski in his article “Ethnic Conflict,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 12. Mr. Sadowski is associate professor at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

⁵ Thomas M. Franck, “Are Human Rights Universal?” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, p. 191 (emphasis added). Mr. Franck is

Murray and Ida Becker Professor of Law and Director of the Center for International Studies at New York University’s School of Law.

⁶ Neil Postman, as quoted by Yahya Sadowski in his article “Ethnic Conflict,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 12. Mr. Postman is chair of the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University.

⁷ Jacob Heilbrunn, “Globalization’s Boosters and Critics,” *The National Interest*, Fall 1999, p. 118. Mr. Heilbrunn’s comments appear in his review of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, by Thomas Friedman (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999). Friedman’s is a sober and moderate look at the nature and future of globalization.

⁸ *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Edition, “Tribalism.”

⁹ Kaplan, *ibid.* (emphasis added).

¹⁰ Waltz, *ibid.*, p. 46. On page 49, Mr. Waltz quotes Paul Krugman: “The United States is still almost 90 percent an economy that produces goods and services for its own use.” Citing Linda Wiess (*The Myth of the Powerless State: Governing the Economy in a Global Era*), Waltz continues:

For the world’s three largest economies—the United States, Japan, and the European Union taken as a unit—exports account for 12 percent or less of GDP. The world, then, is less interdependent that is usually supposed.

¹¹ A collection of 43 essays edited by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, First Edition, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996. A more direct influence on the protesters was the sensationalized book *When Corporations Rule the World* by David C. Korten, first published in 1995. To Korten, the “when” of his title is “right now.”

¹² Paul Heyne, *The Independent Review*, Summer 2000, p. 137. Mr. Heyne’s comments appear in his review of John P. Powelson’s book, *The Moral Economy* (Ann Arbor: Uni-

versity of Michigan Press, 1998).

¹³ Samuel Huntington, “Robust Nationalism,” *The National Interest*, Winter 1999/2000, p. 31. Mr. Huntington is the Albert J. Weatherhead III Professor at Harvard University.

¹⁴ Heilbrunn, *ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁵ See particularly Eric J. Hobsbawm, *On the Edge of the New Century*, New York: New Press, 2000.

¹⁶ Nancy Birdsall, “Life is Unfair: Inequality in the World,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 76. Nancy Birdsall is executive vice-president of the Inter-American Development Bank. See also Avinash Persaud, “The Knowledge Gap,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2001, p. 107.

¹⁷ C. Fred Bergsten, “America’s Two-Front Economic Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2001, p. 16.

¹⁸ Charles W. Maynes, “The Perils of (and for) an Imperial America,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 36. Mr. Maynes is president of the Eurasia Foundation.

¹⁹ Birdsall, *ibid.* (emphasis added).

²⁰ Heilbrunn, *ibid.* (emphasis added).

²¹ Bergsten, *ibid.*, p. 24.

²² Peter W. Rodman, “The World’s Resentment: Anti-Americanism as a Global Phenomenon,” *The National Interest*, Summer 2000, p. 33. Mr. Rodman is Director of National Security Programs at The Nixon Center.

²³ Conrad Black, “Britain’s Atlantic Option and America’s Stake,” *The National Interest*, Spring 1999, p. 15 (emphasis added). Mr. Black is chairman of Hollinger International Inc., a newspaper publisher whose titles include the London *Daily and Sunday Telegraph*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *National Post* of Canada, and the *Jerusalem Post*.

²⁴ Peter Hitchens, “The View from the Margins,” *The National Interest*, Summer 2000, p. 115. Mr. Hitchens’ comments appear in a review of Norman Davies’ *The Isles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Mr. Hitchens is the author of a forthcoming book, *The Abolition of Britain*.

Christian Myopia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Laodicea was an actual first-century church, and its recorded spiritual condition exposes characteristics—broadly termed "Laodiceanism"—that affect God's church today. In a way, it has affected nearly every person to varying degrees. It has influenced beliefs and views, causing many of God's people to lose their godly sight, and crippling many in making and keeping God's way as their way. Myopic Christianity attacks our spiritual senses in much the same way as an uncontrolled tongue (James 3:2-12) and spiritual blindness and deafness (I Corinthians 2:9) do in those who have never had the advantage of God's Spirit—or worse, in those who have rejected it.

The "Eye" of the Body

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

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

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

A common problem with the greater church of God today is this lack of light and focus on truly godly issues rather than trivial ones. Seeing only one's personal point of view has caused a general blindness within the church, spawning many of the current issues and problems. Too many members can focus only on their ideas and viewpoints, lacking the insight to see beyond the comfort of their own secret places. Even when the points such people espouse are true, their demeanor toward their brethren is

often hostile and their efforts to overcome are lackluster or not based on godly principles.

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

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

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

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

Seeing Myself

A number of years ago, a Topicsmaster in a youth speech club posed this question: "Who would you most like to meet (dead or alive) and why?" Answers ranged from deceased relatives to various biblical characters. One of the more interesting answers was, "I'd like to meet and see myself, just like others can see me." Since this answer

came from a young person, it perhaps did not have the impact it might have had coming from an older, more battle-scarred and problem-filled individual. It nevertheless made a point we should all consider.

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

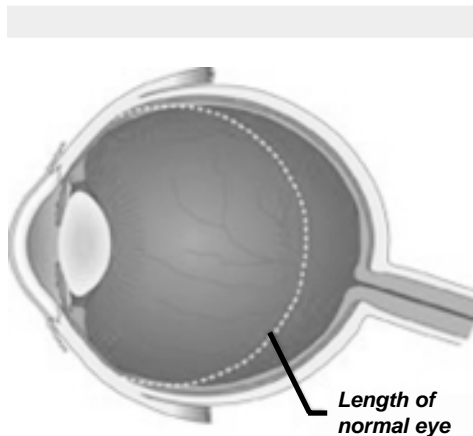
James 1:19-27 tackles this subject of personal myopia. Notice verses 23-24: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes

away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." Here again is a person who is going only halfway, hearing God's Word but doing nothing with it. How often do we hear a message, seeing it only as it applies to others, not to ourselves? Such a person may be able to hear the truth but filters it only through his clouded eyes, or worse, never sees how it relates to him at all.

We see these extremes in God's church today. Some people spend endless hours studying and conveying their discoveries to others, yet hypocritically do not follow their own advice or God's. They may even have understanding that could help others, but potential hearers see only the problems that drown out what they may be trying to say. As the saying goes, "Your actions speak so loudly that I can't hear a word you say." God

wants well-rounded individuals in His Family, those who understand His way of life and cooperate with the rest of His family—not extremists who may be right in their knowledge but wrong in their overall viewpoint, including proper interaction with others.

Another extreme exists in those who are mere spectators, allowing others to preach at them without doing anything about it or even proving or disproving it for themselves. They take a "nothing ventured, nothing compromised" stance, which, though it may be technically correct, reveals a person who will not venture outside his "comfort zone." It is a stance guaranteed to produce no growth whatsoever, either in doctrine or in their personal relationships. All this person sees is his own little world, a perspective that runs contrary to what God purposes for us. He is preparing us to be kings and priests in the world to come, both of which demand an outward, growth-oriented attitude.



The nearsighted eye is longer than normal. Incoming light focuses in front of, instead of directly on, the retina.

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

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

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

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

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

Vision or Blindness

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

As time goes on, many unusual things are prophesied to happen to this world and to God's church. As we have seen

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

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

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



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

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

—Rod Keese

BIBLE STUDY: SECOND TITHE

God has ordained that His people keep His seven annual holy days and that they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in temporary dwellings at a place He chooses. Members can incur hefty expenses in fulfilling God's command. Nevertheless, being wise and merciful, God blesses and provides for those who obey Him in what He requires. He provides for our financial needs at the feasts by having us set aside a second tenth of our

increase so that we may enjoy joyous and abundant feasts with our families.

The second tithe, saved by the individual each year, is an additional tithe of our incomes. Unlike the use of first tithe, however, God designates second tithe for *personal* use during His festivals so that we observe them properly. This Bible study will examine the second or "festival tithe."



1. Where is biblical proof for a second tithe? Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 11, 17; 14:22-25; compare Numbers 18:21-24.

COMMENTS: Moses addresses Deuteronomy 12 to Israel on the east side of the Jordan River. He tells them that, instead of having altars and high places throughout the country, they should bring their required and free-will offerings, other sacrifices, firstlings, and tithes (plural in verses 6, 11) to the place where God put His name. There, the people were to eat before Him.

The second tithe here is in addition to the tithe commanded in Numbers 18. It was to be eaten by the individual Israelite, but not at home ("not . . . within your gates," Deuteronomy 12:17). This tithe was not to come out of the first tithe, because the latter was the Levites' inheritance. The Levites lived off the first tithe in all their cities throughout the year. Therefore, the first tithe that they normally lived on cannot have been the second tithe that God forbids all to eat in their homes. The Bible nowhere states that the Levite had to bring a special tithe to eat at the feasts. The people were to bring it. Verse 18 specifically states that the Levite should also eat of the second tithe where the Lord chose to place His name.

In Deuteronomy 12:11, the plural usage shows that Moses distinctly refers to more than one tithe. Deuteronomy 14:23 uses "tithe" in the singular because the passage describes only the specific tithe that we are to consume where God places His name.

2. What is the purpose of the second tithe? Deuteronomy 12:11-14, 17-18; 14:26; 16:15; Proverbs 3:9.

COMMENTS: The Israelite set aside the second tithe throughout the year and consumed it at the annual holy festivals of God for whatever his heart desired. This means that he spent the tithe on things that enhanced his glorifying of God or added joy to the feast.

The same applies to our use of second tithe today. Unlike the use of first tithe, the individual who saves second tithe should use it. God wants His people to enjoy the physical abundance He provides at the feasts as they worship Him and learn to reverence and fear

Him in ways that please Him. Because of His blessing, many can also help others observe the feasts.

3. What principles support the "tithe of the second tithe"? Proverbs 11:24-25; Romans 13:1-7; II Corinthians 9:1-15; 10:7-8.

COMMENTS: The ministry of God's church must use wisdom in addressing the needs of the church. It has been deemed wise to request help—a tithe of the second tithe—in paying certain festival expenses in advance so that additional responsibilities do not hamper ministers or brethren during the Feast. This tithe of the tithe—not an additional tithe beyond the three commanded in God's Word—is a tenth of the second tithe set aside by the individual and sent to the church office to help the needy to attend the Feast and to cover festival expenses (meeting space, flowers, sound system, brochures, family day, etc.). The collection of these funds is not a command from God, but a request from the ministry. The same giving attitude is necessary for this festival contribution as with any other.

4. Is it wrong to borrow from God's tithes? How have some stolen from God? Exodus 20:15; Psalm 37:21; Genesis 3:1-19; Malachi 3:7-12; I Timothy 5:8.

COMMENTS: Because tithing is giving back to God a tenth of our income, the tithe is not ours but God's. "Borrowing" from any of God's tithes is stealing from Him what is His. There are curses for stealing from God. In the Garden of Eden, God reserved just one tree for Himself, and specifically told Adam and Eve not to eat of it. But Satan convinced them that this tree was also theirs to use. When they took the fruit of that forbidden tree, they sinned by stealing from God and suffered the consequences. We likewise must acknowledge God's prior claim to the tithes that He requires us to give to Him. We must use His tithes according to His specific instructions.

In His infinite love, God has given us the means to worship Him and rejoice with His people at a place He has chosen. Who would want to miss such a wonderful blessing and opportunity to draw closer to God?