

Do You See God?

The Reality of God

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 11-Jan-92; Tape #001

It almost seems as though Someone designed the sermonette to go with the sermon. As a matter of fact, the title of my sermon was mentioned in the sermonette; and that is, "*Do You See God?*" I can guarantee you, on the authority of the Word of God, that, if you don't see God, then you are going to have a very difficult time having any kind of deep commitment—either to your marriage or (most of all) to the work of God.

We have an old saying in United States of America that "seeing is believing." We even have a state, Missouri, that has as their motto "The Show-Me State." The implication is that, unless you show me, I'm not going to believe what you are telling me is true. It seems as though we Americans have grown quite cynical and skeptical about things. We are constantly bombarded with television, movies and the entertainment industry. We know that much of what we see is either staged or fake or blown all out of proportion. We take life very skeptically today. When we hear something, we are not all that sure that we believe it.

I know that you know—but I don't know how deeply you know or understand—that just because one "sees" in the biblical context does not mean that one will 'understand' or 'believe' what is told to him.

Seeing Is NOT Believing

Now let's begin this sermon in John 1:14, where 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.

Let that set the stage for the subject of this sermon. Jesus Christ was seen—He was "seen in the flesh." This was no ordinary human being! It was *God* that people "beheld." Now go back to verse 10, talking about the Word:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Now the people in His day and age saw Him. Did they believe? Did they see God in the flesh walking with them? Teaching them? Giving them the eternal truths of life? Showing them how to live, the way to live—both by word and by example? Were they just "so overwhelmed" by the awe of knowing that this was God? He even proclaimed Himself as being such! Were they so overwhelmed that they said, "Yes, I see. I believe. I'm going to follow." No. The Bible's own witness 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 the children of God, even to them who believe in His name: which 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 one sees does not mean that one is going to believe. That's because, in the biblical sense, there is a spiritual aspect to seeing and believing. The scripture here indicates that there wasn't even a flash of recognition as to His true identity.

Now, think of the incongruity of this. Those of us living near this focus-point of entertainment [Los Angeles] are very aware that personalities in the public eye very frequently try to affect some kind of a mode of dress—a way of life—some kind of life-style—that will set them apart and make them instantly recognizable to the public. Witness people like Elton John and his glasses, multitudes of them. Liberace and his wild flamboyant way of life and his manner of dress. Others have affected other things in their life in order to make sure that people recognized them.

Now look at Jesus Christ for just a minute in your mind's eye. The most unique Personality that ever lived in the history of mankind! A "one of a kind." The only human being who ever lived life sinlessly. And, yet, He could not be *identified* even by those who saw Him. He was not recognized when God was in the flesh and sharing *life* with the people of His generation. All of this seems to indicate that one has to be predisposed to receive this belief—this ability to see. It is interesting, in the context of verses 12 and 13 especially, that those who exercised this faith...

...to them He gave the power [the right, the authority, the ability] to become the children of God. (verse 12)

That is, to enter into a relationship with God that results in nothing less than the creation of a new being.

An Inability to See Christ

Let's continue this theme in John 7:1. We will see here an incident that occurred in the life of Jesus Christ that shows the truth of what I am saying—that seeing is *not* believing.

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him.

Can you think of the incongruity of that? *God in the flesh*, whom they didn't recognize, didn't identify, they sought to kill!

In verse 4, His brothers give Him instructions regarding what they thought that He ought to do with His life—that He should not keep Himself secret.

For even his brothers did not believe in Him. (verse 5)

Those of His own family, who lived with Him day in and day out, didn't believe in Him! That's pretty hard to believe, isn't it? That somebody living with God would not recognize—did not see—Him as God!

He finally went to the Feast of Tabernacles, as it says, going there secretly.

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)

God in the flesh deceiving? Doesn't that show you that there was no recognition?

The people answered and said, "You have a demon: Who is seeking to kill you?" (verse 20)

That comes pretty close to blasphemy, doesn't it? Accusing God of being a destructive demon!

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." [Ah, a ray of hope, a ray of light. Some were beginning to get glimmers of understanding here.] But 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. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him. (verses 40-43)

Look at all the opinions that people held about Him. In Matthew 16 Jesus asks Peter, "Who do men say that I am?" His answer is, "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." There was much confusion regarding His identity!

If He can't be clearly identified, how can He possibly be worshiped? How can people possibly say that they see Him—that is, in the sense of comprehending or understanding that He is an absolutely vital part of our lives? For you and me, He is so vital! He is in us, and He is interested in every aspect of our lives.

Let's go to Matthew 13: 53-57. This follows right on the heels of very fine teaching in which He used parables.

Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He

departed from there. When he had come to his own country [right into Galilee, where He grew 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 not this 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.

He didn't "turn people on" in a positive way, brethren. Overwhelming evidence from Scripture is that mankind did not *see* Him. They were perplexed or disturbed; there were divisions created; some were outright offended.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. (verses 57-58)

We are beginning to see an application to you and me. Will He be working in our lives if we don't *see* Him? If we don't recognize Him? If we don't understand His purpose, what He is working out in you and me? I don't think so! Brethren, we have come out of a world in which there is just as much, if not more, confusion today regarding Him, regarding His identity, as there was when He was walking on the earth. My concern is not whether we can identify Him, because I think that we have identified Him as the Christ. We *see* the real Jesus. My concern is to whether we *see* Him as a vital part of our lives.

Physical Versus Eternal

This sermon is a "spin-off" of a study in the book of Hebrews. In rereading Hebrews in preparation for this message, I have once again been impressed with how physically orientated I am. It is this orientation, this "physicalness," this concern with the material that all of us have to a lesser or greater extent, that plays a powerful part in whether or not we are ever going to really *see* Christ as a vital part of our lives.

Let's go to Hebrews 1:10-12. There is a statement there that we need to consider at this point.

And: "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."

Now, to you and to me, the physical *seems* so solid. It is virtually indestructible. It is permanent—at least, in terms of own short existence on this earth. But this book (specifically, in relation to this sermon, the book of Hebrews) is telling us to get our

attention off that which is immediate, that which is "the around and the about," that which is so physically oriented to us. We are to get our lives, our thinking, our focus, out of that area and into the eternity of Christ's dominion.

One of the profound realities of God and His Word is that *they are changeless*. "You remain," it says there, but we grow old, and we die. The eternal values never change, and even more exciting is that, they can be taken through the grave.

Now, what in life is important to you? Is it the immediate gratifications that are offered by this world? Is it "the around and the about"? If so, I think it is not likely that you will see God very frequently. Let's ask this question in another way. What is it that demands decisions and choices in your life? Brethren, we cannot identify with, we cannot worship, a transient process. Something must "abide." That's what we are being told in verses 10-12. Something changeless must abide. Something must continue unchanging to which we may cling and within which we may live our life here by faith.

A Test

Let me give you a little test, an ink spot test. I'm going to psychoanalyze you. Now you may not be able to see this very clearly, but it's not really all that important that you "see" the ink spot or try to determine what it is. Maybe you would like to try to figure it out. I've tried to figure out what it is. Sometimes I see an old gnome in there. There's kind of a woman. This is her eye right here. This is her mouth and chin. She has a pompadour.

But let me take it away from you now and ask, "What did you see?" Most of us tend to concentrate on the ink, or on its effect. We see the spot, and we don't consciously see the paper. It's there, but we don't think about it. We think about the ink or we think, "What do I see in the ink?" We don't "see" the paper.

Now, what that teaches me is this: We see what we want to see. We see what we expect to see. We see what we are educated to see.

That's pretty much the way it is in regard to the physical and the spiritual. The converted mind is *predisposed* to be able to *perceive* the spiritual aspect of a circumstance. We are *predisposed* this way by the calling of God and the gift of His Spirit, but we must still make the choice to see the spiritual. We must make the choices to follow through on the spiritual, regardless of the cost to ourselves.

In Hebrews 4:1-2, we will see an example of what I have just said:

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.

Now consider these people. They saw a multitude of things—miracles—done by God

through His servant Moses and on occasion, through Aaron. They experienced the water in Egypt turning to blood. They experienced the hopping frogs all over the place. They experienced that eerie, penetrating, darkness that pervaded all of the land. They experienced then the division between Goshen and Egypt; and they were spared from the plagues that came upon Egypt. They knew that there was something "working" in their lives, did they not? Did they not see it occurring when the bugs were all over Egypt; but the bugs were not in the land of Goshen? Did they not experience it when the hail fell and it burned on the ground, burning up all the wood in Egypt—yet it didn't happen in Goshen? Didn't they experience on the Passover night when the firstborn of Egypt were killed, but the firstborn of Israel, because the blood was on the doorposts and the lintel, were not killed? Did they not see that?

Did they not spoil the Egyptians? Didn't they not go out? Did not God part the Red Sea right before their eyes; and all the Egyptian army died there? Did not they spend 40 years when God day after day gave them manna from heaven? Did they not see the water coming like a river out of solid rock? Did they not see quail being blown toward them—practically hip high on the ground—so that they had all the meat that they could possibly eat?

They *saw* the glory of God descending on Mt. Sinai. They felt the earth shake under their feet. They *saw* the mountain of fire. They *saw* the glory of God come down on the tabernacle after it was built. Yet every single one of them, except for two men and their families, perished.

Is *seeing* believing?

Now, what about you? You're here. You're associating with God's true church. Are you a part of it? Do you really "see" it? Do you see what is happening in the life of this Work? Can you examine things of the past and project that out to our future?

Is *seeing* believing? These people never saw God in those works. What they physically saw did not produce spiritual faith which enables one to see God, because (as these two verses show) there has to be a voluntary response by the one given the ability to "see."

The Christian has the responsibility of *responding* to God's calling by acts of faith. The apostle is reminding these people of the deadly seriousness of their situation. God's calling is not indiscriminately mimeographed for all who might chance to see or read. Your calling is a personal invitation. It's been addressed to you! The warning is that, since ancient Israel did not enter into God's rest, someone else will, because God will carry through with His purpose. The Christian, therefore, ought not to think that there is automatic acceptance.

Living by Faith

We need to very seriously consider Israel in the wilderness. They heard the message; but they didn't respond. If you read the preceding chapters in the book of

Hebrews, you will find that their failure to respond is variously called "hardness of heart," "unbelief" or "disobedience." Even though each one of these is distinctively different, they are all in this context synonyms of one another.

Now, why did this occur? Because Israel kept wanting to go back to Egypt. They were looking at all of the events through Egyptian-trained eyes, minds.

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

Brethren, we have to live on the basis of the "words of promise." Hebrews 11:13 says "these all died in faith." The heroes of faith all died in faith "not having received the promises but having *seen* them afar off." And they rejoiced in them. You see, they believed what they *saw*. They identified themselves and God with it. It was this ability to *see* that gave them direction to their lives and set them apart from the rest of mankind.

How important is it that we take advantage of this opportunity to consciously include God in all of our thinking? Turn with me back to John 6:29. We'll let Jesus Himself answer this question.

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

He is saying there that the purpose of the manifestation (the revealing, giving some the ability to *see* God) of the works of God in Christ is to produce faith.

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)

A clear statement of God's will regarding those He has called and given to Christ.

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who *sees* the Son . . . (verse 40)

Now does He mean that physically? I think you know the answer to that is "No." He means *sees* in the sense of "comprehends," "perceives," "understands."

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who *sees* the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (verse 40)

Paul's Example

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

You might remember the apostle Paul, who was certainly well-schooled in the Scriptures, as far as the Hebrew people could give to him. He studied under the feet of Gamaliel, it says. He was certainly a man very intelligent and incisive of mind, a man of conviction and determination. And yet, that same man had to be physically blinded and thoroughly humbled before he could see God. Even though he had a command of the Scriptures that few people in life ever have at the time of their calling, he had that command, yet he couldn't see God working in the infant Christian church at that time.

Christ, in a reproach, a mild rebuke, said to Paul when He converted him on the way to Damascus, "Paul, why are you kicking against the pricks?" That's a question that we need to ask ourselves as well. It's telling you something there—that the carnal mind will reject the evidence that God gives, even though it is suffering with pain. It will reject the evidence. So God's *calling*, God's *Word*, God's *predisposing* so that we can see—so that we have that ability to identify with His Son—is of no avail unless His Word becomes integrated within us.

Okay, now. How are you listening? Disinterestedly? Sceptically? Cynically? Critically? Indifferently? Eagerly? Remember: faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. That "hearing" is a beginning that must be processed, consciously used. Now, when I ask you, "How you are hearing?" I don't mean just at this moment. It includes this moment, but I am talking about "How you have been hearing for the last six months? For the past year or two years? How you are listening listening?" I mean, when you leave services, do you ever follow through with the things that you hear? Unless you do—that's not hearing! And, I can guarantee, you are not going to see God, except very vaguely.

Are You a Fool?

Let's go to another sobering scripture in Psalms 1:1, 4:

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?

I hope that none of us are this "blind." But, I would say, from my experience as a minister, that it is possible that we can be what David described here as a "fool." You might say, "Well, since I have been converted, I have never said that there is no God." Maybe you have said it and don't even realize that you have!

Let me explain. "Fool" here is *nabal*. Remember David and Abigail? Abigail's husband was named "Nabal." He was a fool. It means someone who is contemptible, someone who is empty. It doesn't mean "an atheist." It doesn't mean someone who has no contact with God at all. It doesn't mean that this person does not see God in His creation. The fool that is being described here may readily,

quickly admit that there is a God of Creation—and ascribe that as a part of his life. He may clearly admit it.

This person, this "fool," is not an atheist; but he lives as if he is persuaded that there is no God, 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, but a person who reasons wrongly. A *nabal* is a person who chooses—notice that word, who chooses, or I might say, "assume"—an assumption is a choice—to ignore the fact of God's authority over his life. And, basically, he sees God as an "absentee landlord" who may be safely disregarded because the fool assumes that God is not really active in His Creation. Now that is foolishness!

Foolishness, in biblical contexts, 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 there is no real fear or reverence for God and the things of God. What this results in is nothing less than a "practical atheism." Even though he will readily admit that God is Creator, he lives his life as though God is nowhere around. He's produced a dichotomy—a dichotomy between what he intellectually knows and the way that he lives. God says that person is a "fool." And he is, in reality, saying in his heart, "There is no God."

That's sobering; because any one of us can fall into that use of the word. I can tell you, by Psalms 14:5, that what I just said is true. The fool is aware of God. When the punishment, the curse, comes—when God begins to reveal Himself—then there is great fear. If he didn't think, "There is a God," the fear wouldn't be there. He knows that there is a God; but he lives as if there is not.

Do we see God in His activities? Do we see God in His works? In the manifestation that Jesus spoke about there in John 6:29? Do we see God in His Work? Do we see God in the physical creation? Romans 1 tells us very clearly that God's very power and authority—His very deity—is shown by His creation. All of that is nothing more than a type to help us to understand that *by the physical works* we can identify with this God and know that *He is at work within His spiritual creation as well.*

Brethren, a Christian goes through an educational process designed to help him to see what is important and what is of lesser value—what is reality and what is vanity. But we are responsible for admitting that evidence into our minds and humbly submitting to it, or in rejecting it, be guilty of denying God, even though plainly seeing the evidence.

The Road to Emmaus

Luke 24 contains a very interesting episode occurring right after the resurrection. It's very interesting to think about it in light of you and me, living after the resurrection. We are supposed to be "walking the walk." We are supposed to be "walking with God" and with Jesus Christ. That's what happened to these two men mere 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 [this is, the resurrected Christ] drew near and went with them. (verses 13-15)

We won't go into it in great detail, but it's very interesting that Luke emphasizes the fact that there was movement taking place. You and I, reading this centuries later, are able to apply it to life itself, that is, that our life is not a static process. There is "movement" in our life from the point of birth to when we are called to when we are converted and then right on out to the time of our death. That's when we stop "walking." But from the time of our calling, God is with us. He is leading us and guiding us by His Spirit. He is convicting us of things that are going to be important for His spiritual creation—for our salvation. We repent. We are converted. God comes to "live in us" by means of His Spirit, and then we're really "walking with Christ." We have Christ *in* us.

Now, are you walking with Him? Or are you not walking with Him? In this case in Luke 24, He was literally with them, walking right beside them. And, brethren, *they didn't recognize Him!*

Now you might think that God had blinded their minds. Notice how the passage reads:

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?" (verses 17-19)

Were they "blinded"? You might think so, but I don't. I don't think they were because of what Jesus Himself said right in the context here. But what I want you to see, before we get to that, is that even somebody who had associated with Christ for a fairly long period of time, a good while, can fail to see. They didn't expect to see. Remember? We see what we *expect* to see. We see what we *want* to see. We see what we *are educated* to see.

Unless we make the effort to be discerning, to consciously think about other aspects of what we are looking at, it's very likely that we will not see. We, brethren, have to consciously process the truths that we are receiving from God, as we are involved in the circumstances, as we walk with Christ. Or we might be walking with Christ, and He is there, but we don't see Him. This can happen if we don't identify the circumstances that we are going through in our lives with Him. The spiritual, not perceived, is overlooked!

Now, look at verse 25. This is why I think that they were not 'divinely blinded'.

Because Jesus said to them,

"O foolish ones . . ."

That word in Greek means "inconsiderate." They didn't think! They did not consider. It means "not reasoning right." It's very similar to the *nabal* of the Old Testament. "O foolish ones." They were not properly applying their minds. It carries with it a moral reproach and describes "one who does not *govern* his mind."

Brethren, they 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. And so they didn't *see* the Christ who was with them because they didn't *expect* to see Him! Christ calls them "fools." He not only calls them "fools," which shows me that He expected them to be able to identify Him), He calls them "slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

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. (verses 26-27)

Notice also verse 21. They were giving their explanation to Christ.

But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.

I think their "hope" was really nothing more than a wish. But I think it is significant that it doesn't say in their response as they talked to Him that they trusted Him. You see, they weren't using their faith. They weren't using their belief. There's a big difference between "hoping" and "trusting." Trusting requires making choices and having patient endurance.

At the end of all of this, when they finally *saw* Jesus, when they perceived who it was that was with them, then everything that they experienced—including the crucifixion and resurrection—made sense. Do you get the point there? If you can *see* God working in your life, then every thing will begin to "come together." It may not come all at once like with these people with whom it was a flash of recognition. Everything came together, and they vividly saw the experiences that they'd just gone through in their proper perspective. But, if you can see God involved in the circumstances of your life, as you walk this walk with Jesus Christ, then it's going to give shape and form to your life in a way that you never would have had otherwise! Things are going to make the proper kind of sense. Things will be put in to their proper perspective.

God-Given Comprehension

Now, let's go to I Corinthians 2: 6-15.

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. But they didn't see because, as Paul writes here, they were not mature. "Mature," in this context, means "converted." It doesn't always mean exactly that, but in this context it does. There is a contrast between those who are *able to see* and those who are *not able to see*. And, those who are *able to see* are, in this context, those who are mature.

Even though Christ quoted—and lived—the scriptures that many in His audience were clearly familiar with, they did not see God working through Him. This is the way that it has always been with God's servants. Christ was not the only one. Christ Himself testified that those people "killed the prophets." Now, I think that they would not have killed the prophets if they clearly saw them as being messengers from God. If they clearly believed in God and were fearful of His authority over His creation, His governance of it, they would not have dared to have done that! That's the way it's always been—there are those who *see* and there are those who *do not see*.

Paul testifies here that people are looking into a mystery. This "mystery" is not a puzzle that is difficult to solve, but "a secret impossible to penetrate." So the world, as a result, is not "all there" upstairs. So it *accepts* its own and *rejects* the truths of God.

Seeing God Is Absolutely Necessary

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." (verse 9)

The general idea in much of the world is that the things of God are "too great" for you and me to comprehend. We really can't "get it." We can't *see* it. But, actually, it is so simple to those whose eyes are open that a child can understand. But, brethren, we humanly—to get back to *the carnal mind* again, the natural mind—are so blinded by our traditions and habits of thinking that we have a very powerful tendency to reject the things of God—even though *God has converted us*.

The effect of that is something like this: Remember the story about the three blind men in India who were led up to an elephant? Each man was led to a different part of the elephant. One had hold of the elephant's trunk. And when he was asked what he held, he said, "This is a snake." The second man had hold of the elephant's tail,

and he said, "This is a rope." The third man had hold of the elephant's leg, and he said, "This is a tree."

This is what happens in the world. The world is able to perceive bits and pieces; but they aren't able to put the whole thing together and see the glory of God in its whole—to see God as *a proper part* of the life of a man. Not only "proper" but *absolutely n absolutely necessary!* And to see that the spiritual is needed! That it is *the missing dimension* in a person's life.

If it is seen and *if* it is understood, *then* life begins to make sense. We begin to be able to see ourselves—this single, unique individual, us, I, me—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 your eye has seen and your ear has heard, and it has entered into your heart "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

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 which is from God, *that we might know* the things that have been freely given to us by God. (verses 10-12)

Those three verses prove that we are predisposed by God's calling to see Him. Not only to know His truth, but to know who His servants are, as well. So we can know. We may not know perfectly; but *what we know* is a great source of comfort, security, hope and direction.

Seeing From God's Perspective

These things *we* also speak [Paul, the apostle, specifically; the ministry in its widest application] 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. (verses 13-15)

True wisdom, brethren, is the result of human reason coupled with revelation. But even true wisdom will result only if a person believes what God says. Then, you see, the person has the opportunity to *see* God. And it is hidden from those who put their faith in human wisdom.

"Natural" in this context (verses 13-15) does not mean "evil." It simply refers to a person 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 Spirit of God can *examine* that area and *scrutinize* so as to judge. Therefore, you see, in his judgment God comes into the picture. And, when the Spirit of God comes into a person's life, the basis of his judgment should change! It's not because the person is any "greater" or "better," but because the Spirit of God equips that person to *see* and to use the wisdom of God, because now he can judge all things *from God's perspective*. That's our responsibility!

Brethren, because we've been given this calling, 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. Brethren, the God who raised up Jesus is equal to any occasion—any possibility! Is there *anything* that is too great for Him? Nothing! He throws that challenge out to man—to those who see Him.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego

Let's look at an episode in Daniel that I know you are familiar with, but we'll look at it from this point of view. Daniel 3:16. Here we have Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, three Jewish lads, captives, taken to the land of Babylon. They were educated and used by the Babylonian government because they showed such promise. But that very selection by the Babylonian government put them in peril because Nebuchadnezzar, in his vanity, made an image to his god. He erected it out in the plain of Dura. Then he commanded that everybody was to bow down to it. At the sound of the musical tone, everyone would prostrate themselves before the god of Nebuchadnezzar.

And everybody *did*—except for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. They must have stood out like a sore thumb! Everybody was down on their knees or down on their belly groveling in the dirt. But they remained upright. They couldn't hide. Where were they going to run?

Now, maybe Nebuchadnezzar did not see it the first time that it occurred—that is, he did not witness it. But there were plenty of witnesses that came to him and testified of what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had done—or not done. So Nebuchadnezzar ordered a command performance before him. "Yeah, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Let's see how brave and courageous you are when you have to do it right before me"—this great oriental potentate surrounded by his police force and all the accusers of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego—with a roaring fire there in the background or maybe the foreground.

Now I want to ask you a question. In spite of all the evidence that they had from the around and the about (Nebuchadnezzar, his police force, the accusers, the roaring fire), did they see God? Yes, they saw God, 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 weren't going to 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 his face, but they also *saw* God. Now where did this powerful conviction come? Brethren, that kind of conviction does not arise "on command," at the spur of the moment. That kind of conviction was the fruit of the demonstration of God in the lives of these three young men *previous* to this time and *when* their lives were on the line. They grew in faith over a period of time.

God is the God who is always the same. I Corinthians 10:13 applied to them just as it applies to you and me. He knew what they were able to endure. And they knew that He would provide a "way of escape." So they said, "Even if He does not choose to do that, we still are not going to bow down to your image."

Brethren, why don't more "mighty deliverances" occur to us? I think it's because *we spend so little time fellowshiping with God that we don't see Him as an immediate and vitally important part of our lives* As a result of that, we are overwhelmed by the physical, by the around and the about.

Seeing God in Impossible Situations

We could go on to Jeremiah 25:15, where Jeremiah was put through a severe test. It must have been a very severe test for him. He was told to take a cup of God's wrath, the wine of His wrath. Now, we understand that that wine was just symbolic, but the job that Jeremiah was given to do was not symbolic. It might have been symbolic or parallel to the Work of the church at the end time.

Jeremiah was commanded by God to go from nation to nation, all the enemies of Judah. One by one, he was to take them a cup of wine. And then he was to make the kings of those nations drink that wine. If they refused to drink it, Jeremiah was told, "You will make them drink it!" God must have given him the force of personality—or whatever—to make those men take that cup and to drink the wine. And then it says, last of all, he was to take it to Sheshach. Do you know what "Sheshach" is? It's a code name for Babylon.

Is there a parallel in this Work [of Herbert W. Armstrong]? Do you see God in this Work? Is this Work going from nation to nation? Is it taking, in a sense, the cup of wine of God's wrath and telling what will occur in these nations? What will occur on earth? Last of all, are we going to go to Babylon, and they, too, will have to drink that cup?

There are so many examples in the Bible, in God's Word, of people who *saw* God in

seemingly impossible situations. Yet, for some reason or another—and I believe it's because, just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and just as you and I are being called on to do today—each one is called on to include God and His thinking, His perspective, to see Him in every aspect of life. Then, throughout our life from God's calling on, we are slowly but surely *building* in strength, in confidence and in faith in God. We see Him in everything!

We can see God like David did. A mere lad, apparently; and yet, out of all Israel, out of all of the fighting men, only he *saw* God. Everybody else saw the Philistine army and Goliath. Did that kind of faith—that kind of sight or insight—come because David spent long hours out with sheep *meditating* on the creation of God, *seeing* God's power, His very Godhead in it? Did it come about as the result of David *knowing* the scriptures and *knowing* 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 42: 1-6:

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 with out 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."

Brethren, this is the conclusion, the climax, of this 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 the self was in his line of vision, Job judged God by his own perspective. We see what we want to see. We see what we are educated to see. So Job saw his own wisdom, his own works, before he could see God in His greatness. This is because the carnal mind is trained to do so. Brethren, it takes determination—it takes discipline in study and in prayer and meditation—to break oneself of that natural mode of thinking. And, even when we do succeed, we have to understand that our vision of God still has to be constantly replenished—"day by day," Paul said—and upgraded, exercised, as it were, in the truth.

This is particularly interesting in light of Job. Job was a man who thought he knew God well, but there was still much that he didn't know. During his sufferings, he threw an awful lot of direct challenges at God in an effort either to justify himself or to understand why he was going through this thing. Did you know that God never directly answered any of Job's challenges? Instead, what God did was, beginning in

about chapter 38, He indirectly led Job to see his own insignificance. Do you know that Job never repented of sin? That's because that was not the issue. The issue was that, despite Job's knowledge of God, he didn't really see God as all powerful! That is, that God alone puts down evil and brings to pass all of His holy will.

You can tell the real issue in the book of Job by what God says beginning in chapter 38. God made two speeches there. It was not Job's self-righteousness—that was there—but Job's problem was that he questioned God's justice in the governance of His creation.

When Job opened his mouth to speak here in chapter 42, it was to tell God that he got the point. The point is that *God's purpose is all that counts!* And since He is God, He can bring it to pass. That God has the right, the will and the loving nature to do anything He pleases to anybody, at any time—and good will come from it.

Do you believe that? Let me caution you. A man as spiritually mature as Job didn't . . . until the end of the book.

God's Counsel Stands

Let's conclude with 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."

Brethren, what we have in these three verses is a general principle in which God *challenges* *challenges* us to consider, to compare, all of the material idols, which are so easily seen, to Him.

Joshua said, at the end of his life,

And as for me, 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 promises which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. *All have come to pass to you; and not one thing has failed.* (Joshua 23: 14)

"Remember" is a very important word to a true, spiritual religion. 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*. Being able to see God and have faith is the result of *seeing the evidence* by which God demonstrated both Himself and His purpose in "the former things."

Isaiah 46: 9 says, "Remember the former things." That's what David did. That's what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego did. They remembered "the former

things." God demonstrated *Him self* in "the former things"—not only Himself, but also His purpose. We have to *remember*. But, brethren, it is really *reinforced* and *built* through obedience to His counsel in the present and *seeing* from one's own experience that it truly does stand. And then, one can *see* God!