

## Facing Times Of Stress: Lack Of Clarity

Lack Of Clarity — Blindness

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How many times have we acted on something without sufficient knowledge to enable us to act wisely? I think most of us have done that a time or two in our lives. Through experience, we have learned that we must be clear on the facts before we act. Let me illustrate what I mean:

A pastor is walking down the street one day when he notices a very small boy trying to press a doorbell on a house across the street. However, the boy is very small and the doorbell is too high for him to reach.

After watching the boy's efforts for some time, the pastor moves closer to the boy's position. He steps smartly across the street, walks up behind the little fellow and, placing his hand kindly on the child's shoulder, leans over and gives the doorbell a solid ring.

Crouching down to the child's level, the pastor smiles benevolently and asks, "And now what, my little man?" To which the boy replies, "Now we run!"

This shows, in a light-hearted way, that clarity of what one believes is vital to proper and right action.

People today suffer from a very serious problem that has affected the outcome of political elections, hampered truth in science, caused the demise of many businesses, and even, in the case of religion, blinded many in the greater churches of God, causing them to go into apostasy. The problem is lack of clarity and blindness.

Here is a quote from the *Ambassador College Spokesman's Club Manual, Lesson 3, "Be Crystal Clear:"*

Misunderstanding is the most common ailment of the human mind. People misunderstand each other in conversation, political orations are misunderstood, and nations bicker over misunderstandings. The main reason for all this is lack of clarity. Most people do not say what they mean, nor do they mean what they say.

Clarity, or the lack thereof, also affects the way we face times of stress.

Let us consider it in terms of an extraordinary incident in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as recorded in Mark 8. It is, in some ways, one of the most significant of all the miracles that Christ performed. You are familiar with what Jesus did to this blind man. He took him by the hand, and led him out of the town, and He spat upon his eyes, and put His hands upon him. Let us read the story and get the details:

**Mark 8:22-26** Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."

Now this is obviously something of very great significance. What happened in this case was not accidental. We have other examples of Jesus healing blind people, and it is very clear that He could have healed this man instantly by just saying to him: 'Receive your sight.'

Christ had that power; nothing was impossible for Him. He had done that in another case, and He could have done it here. So what He did here, He obviously did with great deliberation, great forethought, and with a specific purpose in mind. Christ did nothing haphazardly, or accidentally. All His actions were deliberate, and when He varied His technique He always had a very good reason for doing it.

There was nothing difficult about the case, and the variation in the treatment was not due to some random reason. It was due to Christ's own determined plan to do the work of God in this given way, in order that He could teach a lesson and give a certain message, at that time.

In other words, all of Christ's miracles are more than events; they are, in a sense, parables as well. That does not mean that we do not believe in the actual incident as a fact of history.

I am simply emphasizing that a miracle is also a parable, and if that is true of all

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miracles, it is especially true of this one; because Christ obviously varied the procedure here in order to bring out, and to teach, an important and essential lesson.

The lesson was primarily meant for His disciples, which includes you and me. You remember what had gone before. The disciples had forgotten to take a supply of bread with them. The result was, that all they had with them in the ship was only one loaf.

They began to worry about this, and as a result became somewhat unhappy and stressed. Jesus discerned that it was necessary to teach them something in the boat. He said, 'Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod,' and they reasoned among themselves saying: 'It is because we have no bread.'

Because He mentioned the word 'leaven' they thought He must have been talking about bread! They were literalists, they were lacking in spiritual understanding, and so the word 'leaven' made them think only of bread, and of their failure to take a supply with them.

So they were unhappy and uneasy, and Jesus asked them a series of searching questions ending with this: 'Why do you not understand?'

He says, in effect, 'I am here with you. I have been preaching and teaching to you, but you still do not seem to understand. You are worried because you have only one loaf, but you have witnessed two miracles that prove that with just a few loaves and fishes I could feed 5,000 people—why do you not understand?'

It seems that the reason He dealt with the blind man as He did was in order to give them a picture of themselves. He adopted this technique here in order to enable the disciples to see themselves as they were spiritually. They had a lack of clarity; they were still somewhat spiritually blind.

The lesson goes beyond that though: It is a permanent lesson always for God's people. It is a terrible message. Sadly, there are many people like this man; there are many people who seem to be in the first stage through which this man passed in the process of spiritual healing.

Christ put spittle on his eyes, and asked, 'Do you see anything?' Again, we see the answer in verse 24, "And he looked up and said, I see men like trees, walking."

Obviously, the man was no longer totally blind, but we hesitate to say that he can see because he sees 'men as trees, walking.' So, is he blind or not? He is neither one thing,

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nor the other completely. Is he? That is exactly the condition we want to look at here. I am concerned for those Christians who are anxious, unhappy, stressed, and miserable, because of this lack of clarity.

I would just like to put a brief inset, a qualifying statement, in at this point, as I would like to be very clear about what I mean by 'the problem of not seeing clearly.'

The apostle Paul mentions, in II Corinthians 4:18, that "While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

This is not the kind of seeing that I am referring to in this sermon. Sometimes we expect too much of ourselves, expecting to know more than we do about God's truth, but it takes a great deal of time and experience, to build our knowledge and our understanding of God's truth. It takes a great deal of effort to rightly apply the godly principles that we learn. We are to live by faith, not by sight! And we know that, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Jesus Christ sees true belief, that is faith, in those who do not see completely, who do not have all knowledge and complete understanding. So my focus is not concerning lack of clarity, where faith is involved. My emphasis is on lack of clarity with regard to spiritual blindness, that causes stress and anxiety, not the type of faith that Jesus Christ was talking about.

That ends that qualifying statement just for clarity of the sermon.

It is almost impossible to define Christians who are anxious, unhappy, stressed and miserable because of this lack of clarity. Sometimes you talk to this type of person and you think: 'This person is a Christian.' And then you meet him again and you are thrown into doubt, and you say, 'Is he really a Christian? Can he be a Christian and say something like that, or do such a thing as that?'

Whenever you meet this person, you get a different impression; and you never quite know whether he is a Christian or not. You do not feel comfortable in saying either that he does see or that he does not see. Also, the difficulty is that not only do others feel like this about these people, they feel it about themselves.

They are unhappy and stressed because they are unclear about themselves. Sometimes they believe they are a Christian, and then something happens and they say, 'Am I really a Christian or not?' They think, 'How can I be a Christian and have such

thoughts?'

They seem to know just enough about Christianity to spoil their enjoyment of the world, and yet they do not know enough to feel positive about themselves. They are 'neither hot nor cold.' They see and yet they do not see.

I think you will agree that I am describing the condition of many people. I am talking about people inside the church, as well as out in the world. It is a distressing condition, and my main goal is to say that nobody should be in it, and nobody should stay in it—and nobody need stay in that condition.

I have described this condition in its general form; now let me express it in specific terms in order to help unclear people to see themselves, and also to help us all to see the condition.

What is it that these people can see?

They see something! This previously blind man in Mark 8, said he saw men, but there was something wrong because he saw them as trees, walking, and not clearly, until Christ put His hands on him the second time.

What do these people see?

Often they notice that something is wrong with them as they are. They are unhappy about themselves. Something has happened to them that has given them a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves as they are. There was a time when they were perfectly satisfied with themselves.

They went on living their kind of life and they thought that there was nothing wrong with it. But they are no longer like that. Something happened to them that gave them an entirely new view of the kind of life they were living.

These people regarded life in the world as wonderful and exciting. But now they have come to see the emptiness—the hollowness of it all; and they are profoundly dissatisfied with that kind of life. They see that it is not a wise way to live, that it is such an empty kind of life. They become unhappy about themselves and moan that they cannot go on as they are. So many people are in this situation when God first calls them.

There are actually a lot of people in that condition, and there are many who pass through that stage. It is a stage where a person sees that everything else is wrong,

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though he has not quite seen that God's way of life is right. That is what often drives him to cynicism, and that is what often drives him to depression.

There are many examples of this condition at which a person may reach the point where he is just sick and tired of the rat race of society. These are people that have not been called by God, but they reach a point where they do recognize that something is wrong in their lives. Often he is a hard worker with legitimate ambitions. But he realizes he is frustrated and worn out from it all. Disappointment suddenly opened his eyes to the whole situation.

The television show, *House-hunters International* sometimes follows the search by couples wanting to leave the hustle and bustle of city life in the United States, and live in the slower paced life of Central America, or some place where it is cheaper, quieter and slower. Many want to run a bed and breakfast and just have a quiet life, or retire.

They arrive at the conclusion that there was no lasting satisfaction in the life they were living. They began to see through it all, but they did not become Christians. They just became cynical and wanted to leave the other behind.

There have been many other people who have given up everything and have gone into some isolated position where they have found a measure of peace and happiness without becoming Christians. That is one possibility of how some people face times of stress.

But a person may go even further; he may see the excellence of God's way of life as indicated in the Sermon on the Mount. He may agree that living by the principles of the Bible is the way that everyone should live. He may have gone on to read about the lives of the patriarchs, Christ and the apostles, and the wonderful life, and great example and abilities and virtuous qualities that they manifested in their lives.

A person may agree that if everyone lived as I Corinthians 13 describes, the world would be a wonderful place. Many people have come to see at least that much very clearly.

There are people who have come further than that; they may have come to see that Jesus Christ is the only hope, that 'Christ is somehow Savior'—somehow. They have felt that He could help them; they have come to see that Christianity is the only hope for the world, and in some way they see and know that this Jesus can help them.

There was a time when they were not interested, when they had dismissed Him without

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serious thought; but that is no longer the case. Having seen the emptiness of the world, having realized that Jesus Christ is the One who has made a difference, they see somehow that He is a Savior. So they are interested in Him and concerned about Him. They see that somewhat unclearly.

When they see the true nature of God's way of life in the true Christian, they see that man cannot lift himself up to that. They see that they cannot save themselves.

What I am describing here is that these people cannot see clearly, similar to that man in the hands of Jesus Christ when asked the question: 'Do you see?' and he replied: 'Yes.' He certainly could see—he could see 'men like trees, walking.' And these people that I have described have come to see something. They may see all of these things I have described to you.

Nevertheless, they are still confused, they still do not see clearly. They have simply seen 'men like trees, walking.'

Let us look at three main important areas where they fall short:

First, their mind is not set on seeking the truth. They have no clear understanding of certain biblical principles. That is why they have seen that Christ is only 'somehow' the Savior. But they do not see how He is the Savior.

For example, they are not clear about the death of Christ, and its absolute necessity, because they do not believe they are all that bad—that they are all that sinful, they just see sin in others. When you talk to them about these things, you find that they are full of confusion. This confusion causes anxiety and they feel greatly stressed.

They say that they do not see, and they do not see because they do not understand why Christ had to die. You have met these people before. They are dissatisfied with their own lives, yet they praise God's way of life. They are ready to talk about Christ as Savior, but still they 'cannot see' certain truths. The result is that they are troubled and unhappy. It is not surprising that they are usually self-righteous.

Their inability to recognize the truth is a blindness that usually stems from a guilty condition. Such blindness to the truth and mental confusion could actually be the result of God's judgment on those who do not want to admit the truth, and who therefore forfeit the ability to perceive it at their cost.

**Deuteronomy 28:15** "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice

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of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

**Deuteronomy 28:28-29** "The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. "And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you.

This blindness and confusion of the heart is the result of disobedience.

In both physical and spiritual instances in scripture, blindness represents terror, weakness, helplessness, anxiety and despair, unless reversed by God's miraculous intervention.

The apostle Paul describes the reason for gradual degeneration into spiritual blindness when he writes in Romans 1:21, of those whose foolish hearts were in a riddle; spiritual things were an enigma to them. He writes, "Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

They were blinded, or they suffered from an extreme lack of clarity. Refusing to submit to God's sovereignty is the intentional blinding of oneself.

**Isaiah 29:9-13** Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. For the Lord has poured out on you [i.e. the disobedient] the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, namely, the seers. The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am not literate." Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.

The root of sin is the failure to value God above all things, so that He is not honored or

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praised as He should be. Human beings are not necessarily foolish in the sense that they are intellectually deficient, but in rejecting God's sovereignty over their lives. They knew God, not in a faithful and submissive sense, but they knew of His existence and His attributes.

Jesus described the religious leaders and teachers of his own generation in terms of blindness—spiritual blindness, specifically. The irony of their situation is that in their spiritual ignorance they assumed that they understood perfectly.

The old adage: "Ignorance is bliss!" eventually shows its untruthfulness—its faultiness—because sooner or later cause will have its effect, and problems resulting from ignorance will produce evil fruit. So, the first area that they fall short in is that their mind is not set on seeking the truth.

The second area that they fall short in, and do not see clearly, is that their heart is not fully committed.

**Isaiah 6:9-10** And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed."

This was true of the Israelites, both leaders and followers. Only God, in His mercy, can reverse this condition. Isaiah prophesies that in the Millennium: "The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped." (Isaiah 35:5).

**Isaiah 42:16** I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.

Then, speaking to the Israelites directly:

**Isaiah 42:18-20** "Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but you do not observe; opening the ears, but he does not hear."

So these Israelites in a rebellious way were not bothering to try to understand, or even trying to clear the cobwebs out of their mind, because of their disobedience.

The phrases, 'servants of God,' 'My servant,' and 'The Lord's servant,' are references to God's people (the ancient Israelites, or members of God's church), and are used to designate true worshippers. The word 'servant' here, in verse 19, is used to designate those who professed to be the true worshippers of the LORD. In the previous verses, the prophet Isaiah had spoken about the blindness and stupidity of the Gentile world.

Here, he turns to his own countrymen, and addresses them as more blind, and deaf, and stupid than they. He asks, 'Who is as blind as they are?' Isaiah's point is, that the Israelites had had far greater advantages, and yet they were so sunk in sin that it could be said that comparatively none were blind, but the Israelites. Even the degradation of the pagan nations, under the circumstances of the case against them, could not be compared with the extent of blindness of the Israelites. Because the Israelites had been given the opportunity and the knowledge to understand, but they rejected it, which made them worse than the Gentiles who did not have that opportunity.

Relating this to today, although the people who do not see clearly are able to see many things, they do not really find their happiness in God's church, and in living God's way of life. Somehow or another they are not moved by it; they are not totally committed.

They always have to remind themselves of it and are continually trying to use it to pull themselves up from discouragement. The problem is that they do not find lasting relief of stress, or real joy, in it because they connect it with the material world rather than the spiritual world.

They just are not happy people; they still try to find their joy, as far as they have any, somewhere else; their heart is not fully engaged. It is my intention here to only give a broad view of the general condition. So, the second area that they fall short in is that their heart is not fully committed.

The third area that they fall short in, and do not see clearly, is that their will is divided. They are rebellious, they do not see why a man, because he calls himself a Christian, has to do certain things and stop doing others. They think that that is being narrow. But they denounce the old life and embrace the Christian life in general as a good idea, and they like the people in the church. But as far as making real changes in their lives they do not pursue that.

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They acknowledge Christ as Savior, and yet when it comes to the question of the application of His teaching through the will, there is confusion and they are not clear about it. They are always arguing about this, always asking if it is right for them to do this or that.

There is a lack of ease in the area of the will. I am not trying to give a very literal, accurate and detailed description of them. There are many of us who have been through this stage and know it from actual experience.

Christ adopted this procedure physically in the case of the blind man of Mark 8:22, while sometimes He seems to do something similar in conversion. There are people who see some things clearly right away; there are others who go through stages.

Those who go through the particular stage of being in this nondescript condition, professing Christian, but not Christian do not just happen to be in this stage; there are causes that they are in these changes!

Although a metaphor, blindness may describe mere ignorance. It usually carries the overtones of an unwillingness to face up to the truth; and in the case of those who do not believe in Christ, Satan has blinded them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe." Christian believers who revert to their pre-Christian ways are described as blind.

**II Peter 1:9** For he who lacks these things [virtues produced by faith] is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

**I John 2:11** But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

So we see there the reverse of loving your brother, and when we hate our brother we make ourselves blind spiritually.

They do not see the contradiction expressed in their behavior. Blindness describes the fact that they are unaware of the seriousness of their condition. The attitude of the Laodicean church of Revelation 3, is described as being in that blind condition. So the third area that they fall short in, is that their will is divided.

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Just before Jesus performed the miracle of healing the blind man, He asked His disciples a series of questions:

**Mark 8:13-21** And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread." But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven." So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

Why did Christ teach the disciples by asking a series of questions, and then put it all in this dramatic form in this incident we read in Mark 8:23?

**Mark 8:23-25** So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.

So, what are the causes of this lack of clarity—this blindness—that brings on spiritual anxiety and depression?

Why are people in this state of a lack of clarity that brings on spiritual anxiety?

Let me give you four reasons, or specific causes for this:

The first cause is that these people generally object to clear-cut definitions; they dislike clarity and absolutes. They do not like ministers who say, 'this is sin, and this is not!' They have chosen to remain in a darkened condition.

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It may be that they object to clarity of thought and definition because of its demands. For some people, the most comfortable type of religion is always vague religion—nebulous and uncertain—cluttered up with forms and formal procedure.

**Romans 1:21** Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that Roman Catholicism attracts certain people. The more vague and indefinite their religion, the more comfortable it is. In their minds there is nothing as uncomfortable as clear-cut Biblical truths that demand decisions.

These are the people who say, in various ways, 'You are being too precise, you are being too legalistic; you are being rigid and too narrow in your conceptions.' I am sure you are familiar with that type.

About thirty years ago, I worked with a woman who was not religious at all, but then she married a Catholic, and decided to convert to Catholicism. I asked her, 'Why did you decide to become a Catholic?' She had a very simple answer. "I love all the pomp and circumstance, the glitter of the cathedral, and the beautiful robes of the priests. It all seems so religious." That was the extent of her conversion.

If a person starts with the theory that Christianity is not clear-cut, he should not be surprised if he finds himself, like the incompletely healed blind man, seeing 'men as trees, walking.' If he says that he does not want an exact focus, or a precise definition of God's truth, he probably would not have it.

**Romans 11:7-10** What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

Then he gets into Israel's rejection, and how it is not final.

**Romans 11:11** I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?

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Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Israel rejected it, and it was offered to the Gentiles.

These people have a very serious problem because they generally object to clear-cut doctrines, and dislike clarity and absolutes.

The second cause of a lack of clarity, which brings on spiritual anxiety, is that they never fully accept the teaching and the authority of the scriptures. They do not view the Bible as the inspired written word of God; they never actually submit themselves totally to its authority.

Jesus said, "Come to Me as these little children." If, as adults, we came to the scriptures as little children and took them at their face value and allowed them to direct us, this kind of trouble would be greatly minimized. (Of course, it is understood that it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to truly understand the spiritual principles involving the salvation God offers, and to have a totally clear view of scripture). But these people will not accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior and receive the Holy Spirit. They mix their own ideas with biblical truth and create a god to worship who is formed in their own image.

**Romans 1:22-23** Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man.

They claim that their beliefs come from the scriptures, but (and that is the fatal word) they immediately proceed to modify it. They accept certain Biblical ideas, but there are other ideas and philosophies that they desire to bring with them from their old life of spiritual blindness. They mix natural ideas with spiritual ideas. They say they like the Sermon on the Mount of the Gospels, and the love chapter of I Corinthians. They claim that they believe in Christ as Savior, but still they argue that we must not go too far toward what they label 'legalism.' They claim that they believe in moderation, when in reality they are religious progressives. And so, they try to modify the spiritual intent of the scriptures to make it easier for the brethren.

They refuse to accept the inspired written word of God authoritatively in every respect, in preaching and living, in doctrine and worldview. 'Lifestyles have changed,' they say, 'and life is not what it used to be. We are now living in the twenty-first century.' So we

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see in a great way what Rick Warren is doing in the Purpose-Driven church. He is doing this to the full extent of the evil involved in it. So they modify it here and there to suit their own ideas instead of taking scriptural doctrine right through from beginning to end.

This is God's Word and it is timeless. And, because it is God's Word we must submit to it, and trust Him to employ His own methods in His own way. But others never fully accept the teaching and the authority of the scriptures.

The third cause of a lack of clarity, which brings on spiritual anxiety, is that almost invariably its victims are not interested in doctrine. Sometimes these people will foolishly contrast what they regard as spiritual reading of the scriptures with doctrine. They say that they are not interested in doctrine, that they like biblical interpretations instead.

**II Peter 1:16-21** For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

These individuals that are not interested in doctrine prefer to focus on prophecy because it means that they do not have to focus on overcoming sin. Sometimes these people are obsessively interested in prophecy, and more than anything else they want to know what is going to happen next in the world scene that may affect them personally. But that is not the primary purpose of prophecy.

The primary purpose of prophecy is to glorify God as the Sovereign Sustainer! It gives us a motivation to overcome and conquer our sins, and to avoid making the mistakes for which the world will be judged.

People who are not interested in doctrine claim to believe the doctrines that are in the Bible, but they draw a fatal contrast between Biblical interpretations and doctrine. But, what is the value of Biblical interpretation unless it leads to and reveals truth?

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It is not that hard to understand their position in keeping doctrine at arm's length. Doctrine focuses on things that require lifestyle changes from mainstream society, it is painful to change what one does habitually or what one has always done.

It is one thing to be interested in words and shades of meaning. That does not really bother people. That does not focus attention on sin, nor call for decision. People can sit back and enjoy that.

But doctrine speaks to us and insists on a decision. Doctrine is truth, and it examines us and tries us and forces us to examine ourselves. So, if we start by objecting to doctrine as such, it is not surprising that we do not see clearly. The whole purpose of all the 'statements of beliefs' or 'articles of faith' drawn up by the church, is to enable people to see and to think clearly.

In the early centuries of the church, the gospel was preached from generation to generation. But some people began to say things that were wrong. Some, for example, said that Christ did not really come in a human body, that it was just a phantom appearance.

All kinds of things were said, and many were made miserable and bewildered. These were times of great stress on the church. In fact, the church has been under a great deal of anxiety in contending for the faith constantly for almost two thousand years.

So the church was and is able to grow spiritually because God has given us His inspired written word of doctrines and He has given us the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand clearly. Truth must be defined and safeguarded, otherwise people will walk off into error by following false traditions and false prophets.

**I Timothy 6:20-21** O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

So, if a person is one who objects to doctrine, it is not surprising if he is unable to see clearly and feels a great deal of stress in his life. Learning and understanding the doctrines of the Bible clear a person's spiritual sight. But victims of a lack of clarity are not interested in doctrine; therefore they remain in a state of lack of clarity.

The fourth cause of a lack of clarity, which brings on spiritual anxiety, is that many people do not take biblical doctrines in their right order.

If you are interested in the rebirth and having new life, before you are clear about your standing with God, you will go wrong and you will eventually be frustrated and miserable. The same applies to taking sanctification before justification.

The doctrines must be taken in their right order. In other words, we can sum up all of this by saying that the great cause of this lack of clarity that brings on spiritual anxiety is a refusal to think things right through.

It is the fatal danger of wanting to enjoy something before you really take hold of it and grasp it.

It is people who refuse to think things through, and who do not want to learn, and who become unteachable for various reasons—often self-protection—these are the people who generally become victims of this spiritual confusion, this lack of clarity, this seeing and not seeing at the same time. Victims of a lack of clarity do not take biblical doctrines in their right order.

What temptations should people avoid with regard to this lack of clarity that brings on spiritual anxiety?

The first principle is obvious: avoid making a premature claim that your blindness is cured.

It must have been a great temptation to the blind man of Mark 8:22, to do that. Here is a man who had been blind. Christ put spit on his eyes and said to him: 'Do you see?' The man says: 'I see.' What a temptation it must have been to him to announce to the whole world: 'I can see.' Well he could in a way, but to us he really could still not see, and would probably be considered legally blind.

The man, in a sense, could see, but so far his sight was incomplete and imperfect, and it was vital that he not testify before he had seen clearly.

Blindness is one of the several disabilities that prevented someone born into a priestly Levitical family from offering bread in the priestly service.

Leviticus 21:17-21 describes how when a man had a defect he could not approach and offer bread in the sanctuaries. A blind man, lame man, one who has any limb too long, or broken leg, or foot, hunchback or dwarf were not to function in that way. They were able to receive food, but they were not able to present it because of the purity that God required in His temple.

What does Paul say about the qualifications of an overseer or a minister in God's church?

**I Timothy 3:6** Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

This is the only place that this Greek word "novice" is used. The original Greek means 'newly planted.' Here, the apostle Paul uses it to mean a person newly planted in the Christian faith, a beginner or trainee, a new convert, one who has recently been baptized.

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* has this to say about this verse:

The principle here is that a recent convert runs the very serious risk of being wise in his own eyes, of despising those who are still on the level from which, by his conversion, he has been lifted; and so he becomes puffed up with elevated ideas of his own importance. He has not yet had time to discover his limitations, he is newly planted, he does not fully understand his true position in God's church, and he overestimates himself. For these reasons he is especially liable to instability, and to the other weaknesses and sins connected with an inflated opinion of his own capabilities. His pride is a sure indication of a coming fall. A novice, therefore, must on no account be appointed to the office in question, for he would be sure to bring disgrace upon it.

This principle also holds true for any teaching function in the church.

This mistake of using novices has been made over and over again in the church, probably continually since the time of the apostle Paul. This was something Paul admonished the young pastor Timothy to be careful to avoid.

Speaking of the greater churches of God, sometimes novices are harmfully pressed and urged to teach. This can be very detrimental to a novice's spiritual growth. Proclaiming that they see when it is so obvious to many that they do not see very clearly, and are really still in a state of non-clarity. They describe men to others as trees, walking.

So the first principle there is to avoid making a premature claim that your blindness is

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cured. I brought this up partly because I have been hearing of incidences, where some of the other churches in the greater churches of God are putting young men in positions of giving sermons and other duties and they have only been baptized for a very short time, some barely even a year, and sometimes they are only eighteen. I am very concerned with this trend that is going on out there.

The second principle is the exact opposite of the first. The temptation of the first is to run and to proclaim that they can see, before they see clearly; but the temptation to the second is to feel absolutely hopeless and to say: 'There is no use in going on.'

In a manner of speaking, this person has had spit put on his eyes (he has been called), but although he sees, he is simply seeing 'men, as trees walking.' People like this can become confused and feel hopeless. They stop reading their Bible, and they stop praying. The Laodicean can actually be either of these two types of people.

**Revelation 3:14-18** "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—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.

Not seeing 'men like trees, walking,' lacking clarity—but similar (in type) to when Christ put His hands on [the blind man's] eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. He saw with crisp physical clarity—better than 20/20 vision. That was because he was willing, and asking Christ to do more.

In a sense, it is like our calling and conversion—God calls us by revealing just enough for us to see His truth, but it is still not clear. Then, by faith and submission we say, "I want to see more clearly—I want to be baptized, and receive God's Holy Spirit, so that I can see clearly."

So, what is the cure? What is necessary in order to have clarity in facing times of stress?—The Holy Spirit, yes, but what else? The very influential 17<sup>th</sup> century French mathematician and philosopher (and son of a judge) Blaise Pascal, is credited with

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saying: "Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what it loves."

**I Corinthians 13:12** For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face [at Christ's return]. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Paul tells us that the day will come that we will see as clearly as Christ does.

**I Corinthians 13:13** And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Ancient mirrors were made from polished metal (such as bronze), and so one's reflection was even more "dim" than in modern mirrors. But what is important is that we must work with God to develop godly love, because on our own our love is just a faint image seen in a mirror, very dim.

Christ turned to the healed formerly blind man and 'He asked him if he saw anything.' And the man said, in absolute honesty: 'I see men like trees, walking.' The man's honest answer made it known to Christ that he needed more help to see clearly.

This is the attitude that is necessary in asking God to help us see His truth more clearly—an honest, humble attitude in prayer and thanksgiving.

**Philippians 4:6-7** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Our responsibility is to submit our selves to God the Father and His Son—to submit completely as this healed man did. He did not object to further treatment, he rejoiced in it. And probably if Jesus had not taken the further step, he would have asked Him to do so; and we can do the same.

Christ never leaves anything incomplete. This man was healed and restored and saw every man clearly. Our position as members of God's church is a clear position. We were not meant to be left in a state of doubt and worry, of vagueness and unhappiness.

It is not unusual for great spiritual leaders to have their days of doubt and uncertainty. Moses was ready to quit on one occasion, and so were Elijah and Jeremiah; and Paul also knew the meaning of despair.

**II Corinthians 1:8-10** For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,

So God continually delivers us past, present and future, in times of stress, anxiety and trial.

There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind, and in a doubtful condition we cannot understand what God is doing, or why He is doing it. Unbelief is a matter of the will—it is unfaithfulness in that we refuse to believe God's Word and obey what He tells us to do.

Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong, but it may be a sign that he is thinking.

A member of God's church can have doubt that is not born of willful unbelief, but of doubt caused by physical and emotional stress. We often experience anxiety; and this society and its willful sins place us under a great deal of stress.

The Son of God came so that we could see clearly, that we could know God. He came to give salvation and eternal life. He has promised to do it, and He will do it. We are not to be unclear Christians—seeing and not seeing. A clear mind loves God passionately and sees distinctly what it loves. We must love God passionately, because if we see distinctly what we love, we will have clarity of mind, and we will not have that blindness.