

To See or Not to See?

In this series of articles we're looking at the cause of our unhealthy fear and anxiety from the gospel of Matthew 6:19-34. I've noted from this passage of scripture that the cause of our anxiety is misplaced trust. Jesus has been teaching this truth, first, by comparing "earthly treasures"—things we place an inordinate and unhealthy value on—including anything or anyone that we place as a priority over God, with "heavenly treasures,"—things that we do with our life that are meant to have eternal value—including using our wealth, time and opportunities to serve others, showing mercy, being quick to forgive, etc. This is not to say that we're pleasing to God merely based on our external obedience to him and service to others. The motivation for our obedience and service must be from a heart that has been changed by the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

As we look further in this passage we discover that there are two other distinct contrasts that Jesus is teaching us about. Along with "contrasting treasures" Jesus next speaks of what I'll call "contrasting vision." Notice this contrast in verses 22-23. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." Jesus is using a metaphor that speaks of the way in which we see or understand things. The contrast is between those who have "healthy" vision because of an intake of true light versus those whose "eye" or vision is "bad" or unhealthy which results in continued darkness. Jesus is not focusing on seeing as merely the act of observing, but rather the way in which we take in, understand and respond to truth.

The fact that our external actions are intimately connected to our inner, heart attitudes is a foundational truth taught in scripture. In other words, how we live our lives, the thoughts we think and even the words that come out of our mouths are the direct result of what we truly believe. "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45) It's helpful to a proper understanding of our text in Matthew to note that the scriptures often speak in terms of a close connection between our eyes and our heart. For example: "The light of the eyes rejoices the heart..." (Proverbs 15:30) The apostle Paul in the New Testament writes, "...having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you..." (Ephesians 1:18; See also Psalm 119:11, 15)

Looking back at our verse in Matthew, the word translated "healthy" can mean "sincere, healthy, without guile, honest, clear" and even "single." New Testament commentator, Richard France notes that Jesus is using this metaphor of a "healthy" or "single eye" to speak of an "undivided loyalty to God." Jesus, then, is giving us another cause of anxiety. Along with the misplaced trust that happens by placing an unhealthy priority on "earthly treasures," he now includes the truth that we will live with anxiety to the degree that we have "unhealthy vision." In summary, the metaphors "healthy eye" and a "body that is full of light" are terms that together speak of a single-minded devotion to God's word in every area of our lives.

Looking back at the text, Jesus concludes this section by saying, “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” Those with healthy vision look to God’s word as a “lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.” (Psalm 119:105). To reject God’s word, or even to treat it with indifference, will result in “walking in darkness.” Christians must seek, by grace, to rightly understand and walk in the light of God’s revealed truth in Holy Scripture. As the Spirit works with the Word in our lives the effect will be that we are increasingly being set free from unhealthy fear, worry and anxiety. Like King David in the Old Testament we want to be able to truly say, “I sought the LORD and he delivered me from all my fears.” Psalm 34:4

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.