

The Blind Spot

Opening Hymn: #183—Watchfulness

Luke 6:41,42 (NIV) Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Of course our Lord is not talking about literal sawdust nor does he think anyone is carrying around a literal plank in their eye. But as a figure of speech, this is vivid language. You think you see some small defect in another brother and are eager to correct that condition. However, you don't realize you possess a much greater defect which in comparison to a grain of sawdust is like a plank. How could this possibly be? How can we NOT see defects in ourselves? The condition is called the "blind spot."

The place in the back of your eye where the optic nerve enters the retina is not sensitive to light, yet your brain fills in what it thinks ought to be there. That place is called the blind spot. The dictionary also defines a blind spot as "an area in which one fails to exercise judgment or discrimination." Of course one's brain supplies what is missing so we are not even aware of the failure.

Take a moment and think about yourself. There are things you know about yourself. Others around you also know things about you. There are four possibilities:

1. Things known by you and others.

There are facts that everyone knows about you. You may, for example, dress or speak well. You may have a good sense of humor. Your height and weight could be fudged a little, but those facts are reasonably well known. Unless you've lied about it, people generally know your age, your family relatives, your background in the truth, your job. This is the "you" that is your public image.

2. Things NOT known by either you or others.

This is not an interesting area because there's nothing we can do about it. There might be a potentially fatal disease at work within your body. You don't know it, neither do others. This area is known only to God and He may or may not choose to reveal it to us.

3. Things known by you, but NOT by others.

This is the private "you," the part you've elected to not share with others. You know how devoted you are to the Lord in your heart, but others don't know because they can't read your heart. You may have been struggling with a particular trial or sin but others don't know because you don't talk about it. Hypocrisy is generally something you know but others don't. That Greek word describes what an actor does. He knows he's acting, but others may not know, particularly if the acting is very good.

When we know something about ourselves that we don't like and keep secret, we still can do something about it if we try. But today we are not talking about sins we know about. It's the sins we don't know about that concern us:

4. *Things known by others, NOT by you.*

And THAT defines your blind spot. It is the unseen "plank"—unseen at least to you—that is in your eye; it is what interferes with your vision as you point out the speck of sawdust that is in your brother's eye. But in this case you don't even know you have a problem. You can't see anything that is in your blind spot. So how can you possibly do anything about it? Answer: you have to reduce the size of that spot.

Luke 6:1,2 (NIV) One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grainfields and his disciples began to pluck some heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (i.e. threshing grain)

The Pharisees were quick to point out this minor infraction of the law prohibiting any work on the Sabbath. It was a "speck of sawdust" in their brother's eye. And as for them:

Luke 20:47 (NIV) (The teachers of the law) devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.

The Pharisees had an enormous blind spot. They could **not** see the "plank" that was in their own eye yet they thought they could clearly see the defects in others. Jesus called them "blind guides" (Matt. 23:24) though that was hardly a characterization they'd apply to themselves. Because we can see it in them, it stands as a warning to us.

Psa. 19:12,13 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.

Secret faults are those faults we do not see because they are hidden by our blind spot. David is NOT asking to be cleansed from sins he doesn't know about and that he will never know about. He knows the necessary first step is to make these faults and sins visible. Then he can do something about them and be cleansed. The Pharisees never really saw the prejudice they had against the poor and what favor they had for those of their own class. They appeared to be absolutely blind even though Jesus tried hard to get them to see it.

Once upon a time a wealthy man happened to see a beautiful woman while she was bathing. Even though he was already married, he was so impressed by what he saw that he arranged to meet her; then he slept with her. She became pregnant. This complicated matters because everyone knew her husband was out of the city on an extended assignment for the wealthy man and that he would probably be away for a very long time. So to solve what seemed like a big problem, he arranged to have the husband killed. Then he married the woman.

Do you see anything wrong here? If we were to interview the wealthy man, do you think he would see anything wrong with what he did? We need not guess. This man sees nothing wrong at all. Wealthy, powerful people make their own rules. He has a very large blind spot.

This is not a hypothetical story. All the sordid details are recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 11. The wealthy man is David. The woman is Bathsheba. And he is no ordinary man. He's the king. How would you propose discussing this incident so that he can see this secret sin, secret in the sense that he can't see it? The Lord sends the prophet Nathan to the king with instructions to try an indirect approach. Nathan begins with a story:

2 Sam. 12:1-7 (NIV) "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb . . . Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man that did this deserves to die. He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Nathan goes on to make it clear: You murdered Uriah, then you took his wife to be your own wife. David is stunned. You can almost see his blind spot disintegrating in an instant. He doesn't know what to do except to confess his great sin: (vs. 13) And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.

Sometime after this incident David wrote Psalm 51:

Psa. 51:1-3 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

We can commend David's quickness to confess his sin and seek forgiveness. But acts always have consequences. Whether we do wrong blindly or deliberately, eventually there is a price that has to be paid. David was no exception. Although God did not take David's life following the law's eye-for-an-eye rule, there were consequences from this terrible act:

1. (vs. 10) *You will never live in peace.* David had nothing but trouble from that moment until he died. Bathsheba's grandfather, A-hith-o-phel, one of David's trusted counselors, later worked against him and even told Absalom he would kill David for him (17:2).
2. (vs. 11) *Evil will come out of your own house.* In the next chapter one of David's sons rapes one of his daughters; then the daughter's brother murders the rapist, who is his half-brother. As with David's own sin, sexual immorality is again followed by murder, but this time in **his** own house.

3. (vs. 11) *Your wives will be defiled openly*. In 16:22 his concubines were defiled by his son Absalom as a show of power in front of all Israel.
4. (vs. 14) *Bathsheba 's child shall die*. And it did.

We have all seen people who sow wild oats. How curious that they act so surprised when they get a crop of wild oats. Lie and you will be lied to. Show no respect for others and eventually the others will return the favor.

God does not insulate us from the consequences of our acts. If He did, we would learn nothing from them.

So what's hidden away in your blind spot? You don't know. Without work on your part, you can't know. David didn't see his sin, but Joab certainly knew because he carried out David's orders. Others must have known that Bathsheba had slept with David. But those who know your secret sins—those sins which are hidden from your own view—are not going to tell you. Why should they? You'd probably get mad. Besides you won't believe them anyway.

Most of us have very little trouble giving others good advice. We see exactly what's wrong with them and what they should do about it. We think we see a "speck of sawdust" in their eye and we want to help them get rid of it. So how much good advice do we give ourselves? Very little, probably, mostly because we don't see too much wrong, or that we are inclined to do much about.

Oh that we had as much zeal to correct ourselves as we have the fondness to reprove and correct others.

How can we correct what we don't know about? We can't. So our first job is to find out what constitutes that "plank" in our own eye.

There is an exercise done with kids to teach self-esteem. Each kid has a piece of blank paper pinned to his back. Other kids write good things they perceive about that person on the paper. Afterward everyone removes their paper and reads what others had written. Suppose we did that here. How do you think you'd feel if you got to read good things others wrote about you. Would you argue and say they're wrong, that those things weren't true? I don't think so.

Step two, which is almost never taken with kids, goes after the blind spot. Again a blank sheet of paper is pinned to each person's back. But this time everyone writes one thing they think the person does not see in himself. What are some of the things we might write about people we know?

You always interrupt before I can finish expressing my thought.

You talk as if you are the final judge about what is and what is not truth.

You are the leader of a clique in this class and I feel excluded.

You belittle women by the way you talk about them.

You insist that things be done your way.

You show jealousy over the good fortune of someone else.

Although you make mistakes, you say it is never your fault.

Now picture yourself removing the paper. Can you stand to read it? Would you argue and say they're wrong, that those things aren't true? Perhaps. Our minds are all too willing to cover up unpleasant truths about ourselves that we really don't want to know about.

The person who is physically blind is deprived of many privileges. Although he can still do many wonderful things, he is restricted. Blind spots in the mind similarly restrict us because they generally produce bad character traits. Like David, we need to pray that these hidden sins be revealed, and that we receive the needed help to cleanse ourselves from them.

Because we don't go around with sheets of paper pinned to our backs, we have no mechanism for knowing just what others see that we don't see. So we must from time to time indulge in self-appraisal.

In most large businesses today, everyone gets an annual performance appraisal. One learns what good things were done and what could be improved. Many managers hate to do appraisals because although they may have complaints, it is not easy delivering them face to face.

So let's face ourselves honestly and give ourselves an appraisal. There is no point in listing all our shortcomings. The best results come from an appraisal that focuses on just one area for improvement during the coming year. What might that be with us?

Anger

Do you really expect others to control their tempers even as you lose yours? From time to time we hear about brethren, elders even, who are so sure they are right that they lose control of themselves in a fit of anger.

Prov. 27:4 Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous.

If this is you, don't tell us about how in your case your anger is really righteous indignation. If you realize that you have in the past given in to anger and wrath, start to do something about it.

Partiality

The word "prejudice" is not found in the Bible. But the idea that we like the Pharisees would treat some as first class citizens, others as second class citizens, and maybe a few as tenth class citizens, is definitely condemned in the Bible:

1 Tim. 5:21 I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

James 3:17 The wisdom that is from above is . . . without partiality and without hypocrisy.

If this is you, don't tell us about how the Lord had his favorites within the ranks of the disciples and so it is OK for you to have favorites too. If you realize you have been partial in your dealings with brethren, start to do something about it.

Envy

Job 5:2 (NIV) Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.

The Hebrew word rendered envy is #7068. This word is also translated “jealousy.” Envy is defined as resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.” Generally the next step after envy is to do something to satisfy it. If you’re king, you act on your desire and take what you want. David took Bathsheba. Ahab murdered Naboth and took his vineyard (1 Kings 21). If you’re not king, you have to do something else. Although you might convince yourself you have no envy, others usually know better by the things you say.

If this is you, don’t tell us about how unworthy others are for the good fortune they have and how worthy you are to receive those same favors. If you have feelings of envy, start now to do something about it.

Some say one’s character is pretty much established by the age of 30. What you are at that age is generally what you’ll be at the age of 60 or 70. But that rule applies to the world. We have to go against the tide. We must try to control and correct our own conduct.

Rom. 12:2 (Phillips) Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed.

We all know about the narrow way and that few there be that find it. The reason few find it is that so few are interested in walking contrary to the world. If we think that we have no character defects or that we have nothing to correct, we deceive ourselves. We have a very large blind spot.

Eph. 4:22-24 (NIV) You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (vs. 31) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

It would be wonderful if we could all listen better. We might learn a lot. If we hear someone suggest how we might be more effective, or do a better job, or be a better Christian, let’s pretend it was written anonymously on a piece of paper taped to our back. Let’s think about it. We need not defend, or explain how that’s not true. Maybe it is true, and our blind spot has kept it from us.

James 1:19 Let every man be swift to **hear**, **slow to speak**, slow to wrath.

There was a poster prominently displayed in a room. Evidently God is speaking:

I never said it would be easy.

I only said it would be worth it.

That’s a good description of the narrow way. Let us keep making progress and let us help our brethren who are walking in this same way so that we all may reach the prize for which we seek.

Two hundred years ago, the poet Robert Burns wrote:

Oh that some power the gift would give us
To see ourselves as others see us!
It would from many a blunder free us.

Let us remember and apply David's prayer to ourselves:

Psa. 19:12,13 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.

The Lord tells us that the standard we apply to others will be the standard that will be applied to us:

Luke 6:37, 38 (NIV) Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

So let us... 1) pray that the Lord will open our eyes; 2) look at ourselves honestly; 3) listen to what others say. In this way the Lord will help us overcome our secret faults.

Closing Hymn: #322— Heirs With Christ

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