

CHRISTIAN EYES — WEEK 1

LEARNING TO SEE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is **The Healing of a Blind Man by Duccio di Buoninsegna**

We see with more than just our eyes; we see with our minds. Christians have a different mindset. This allows them to see things non-Christians don't see — God's hand in things, His purposes, His kingdom.

Through the examples of Paul & Silas, Ananias, Simon the sorcerer, and Martha, we explain the difference between regular eyesight and seeing with Christian eyes.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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Christian Eyes, Week 1 — Learning to See
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1 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.”

The eye is a beautiful example of how we are fearfully and wonderfully made, but the brain’s role in seeing might be even more impressive. Our minds must instantly decode the information from our eyes and convert it into a 3-D image of our surroundings. We take this for granted, but it involves some outrageously sophisticated software.

You may not be familiar with how clever this software is, but you’ve seen its malfunctions—optical illusions. To condense the data from our eyes down to something manageable, our brains must translate it into familiar patterns. When two patterns compete, we get amusing conflicts we can literally see.

Even more fun than optical illusions are cases where we see nothing at first — camouflage.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2253701/Invisible-animals-These-Incredible-images-animals-doing-disappearing-act-predators-near.html>

But the most impressive part is that all this translation happens before we even “see” anything. Our brains have a “pre-processor” that sorts all this out before sending it to our consciousness. Its “pattern recognition software” matches everything with shapes we already know. When we first open our eyes as babies, our brains start building this pattern data base. We literally learn to see.

In today’s passage Jesus fixes the blind man’s eyes, but he still can’t process what his eyes are telling him. His brain isn’t ready. So Jesus installs the software upgrade he needs to see.

Much of Jesus’s teaching is about the kingdom of heaven (or the kingdom of God). He goes on and on about how the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He tells numerous parables about what that kingdom is like.

Why is he teaching about the kingdom of heaven? Why not just about heaven? And why does He use parables? He’s always saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like,” something. Why not just say what it is?

He’s teaching us to see! Just as newborns need to learn to see the world they’ve been born into, those who’ve been born again need to learn to see the kingdom they’ve been born into. We’ll see heaven just fine when we get there. What’s important now is the kingdom of heaven right here.

This series, titled “Christian Eyes” is designed to train our eyes to see all things in terms of His kingdom.

2 Acts 16:23–30

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Everyone sings when they've been beaten and thrown into prison, right?

Not. Imagine you've been arrested and thrown into prison. What would you be thinking?

Why have I been arrested? How can I get out of here? Those are the questions any normal person would be asking.

But that's not what's on Paul's and Silas's minds. The amazing thing isn't that they're singing; it's that they feel like singing. It's as if they had already taken Romans 8:28 to heart long before Paul wrote it.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

They aren't afraid because they know that everything's under control. The great epiphany of the born-again experience is realizing that the universe isn't random. To the untrained eye, everything looks random and out of control. Christian eyes perceive all things working together.

Extraordinary events are extraordinary opportunities to witness for the kingdom and its king.

The end of today's passage shows that principle playing out.

Many people have memorized Romans 8:28 and are heartened by it, but some make a mistake. It doesn't say, "*all things work together for good* for our agenda." Things work together for the good of the kingdom. The word translated as love here is *agapé*. Loving God means prioritizing Him over ourselves.

One could translate the first half of Romans 8:28 as, "*And we know that all things work together for good to those for whom 'good' means 'good for God.'*" Notice how that fits perfectly with the second half.

The martyrdom of many great saints does not contradict Romans 8:28.

3 Acts 9:10–18

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “*Ananias.*”

And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

So the Lord said to him, “*Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.*”

Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

But the Lord said to him, “*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.*”

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Two people gain eyesight in this passage. Ananias starts out arguing with the Lord over his assignment. (That’s Chutzpah, no?) He’s the Lord’s servant, but his perspective is all wrong.

Before he can cure Saul’s blindness, Ananias needs to learn to see with Christian eyes.

And notice how the Lord teaches him to see with Christian eyes. “*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.*”

He doesn’t say Saul will bear the gospel; He says Saul will bear, “My name.” He uses “My name” again in the next sentence with, “*he must suffer for My name’s sake.*”

We think of names as labels, but they’re much more in the biblical languages. We say prayers “in Jesus name.” We baptize “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Names represent authority.

And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. — Mark 13:13a

The Lord will change Saul’s name to Paul. That’s more than some rebranding from the marketing department; it’s a change of identity.

And this Paul will suffer

for My name’s sake.

4 Acts 8:18–24

And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

This is a perfect example of someone not having Christian eyes. Simon claims to be a Christian, but he's thinking only about himself. He witnesses the kingdom advancing but doesn't care about that. He cares about the method involved. He wants that power for himself—not for the kingdom.

Don't get me wrong; it's OK to care about methods and power. We should try to be effective at whatever we're trying to do, and that includes kingdom tasks.

But Christian eyes see all things in terms of the kingdom. Personal advancement isn't of value for its own sake. If it's useful for the kingdom, then it's valuable.

Simon doesn't come around, even at the end. He's repentant, but he's still only thinking about himself. He doesn't want the punishment. If he had learned to see with Christian eyes, he might have been so bold as to ask for the power again, but this time for the right purpose.

Simon repented of his plans to get the power.

He needs to repent of his plans (or lack thereof) to use it.

Spiritual gifts are of tremendous importance—way beyond what most folks realize. When we don't use our spiritual gifts for their intended kingdom purposes, they lay dormant and don't grow. Exercise them and they grow stronger and more exciting.

Do you know what your gifts are? Check out Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:8–10; 28–30, and Ephesians 4:11. If you're not sure, seek the answer. Discuss this with others.

Leaving your gifts lying fallow is a dreadful mistake. You can only truly discover your gifts by exercising them. Seeing them grow stronger confirms their supernatural nature and strengthens your faith.

See why James said that faith without works is dead?

It's at least unconscious.

5 Luke 10:38–42 (NKJV)

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

Martha is a perfectly good servant of the Lord, but isn't seeing with Christian eyes, so she's focused on the wrong things. She's *distracted with much serving*, none of which really needs to be done. What's she worried about? Jesus just fed five thousand people. Her house may be packed, but it's not *that* packed.

Jesus is teaching. And what would He be teaching about?

The kingdom, of course. He might be teaching that the kingdom is at hand. Or he might be telling a parable that begins with "The kingdom of heaven is like ..." So, what is Martha distracted from?

It's not just that she's distracted from Jesus's teaching.

Martha's distracted from the kingdom.

This leads to what might be the most difficult teaching about Christian eyes—distraction. Our eyes are for the essential functions of everyday living, and when we get distracted (e.g., while driving) things can go very wrong.

Christian eyes add a new level of perception. Notice also that this, like our regular vision, is a mental function. We don't have extra eyeballs; we have extra pattern recognition software. Christian eyes see the kingdom and see all things in terms of the kingdom. We see God's providence, sometimes even His plans.

But this is where distraction kicks in. Christian eyes see who's in control, but distractions can cause us to revert to regular eyes. Some distractions are very distracting.

Martha's house was packed like never before. She's running around like a chicken with its head cut off in a panic about how to properly host such a massive crowd. Martha may have Christian eyes, but she's distracted by the stress of a situation she's not used to.

But nothing is as distracting as the stress of pain or danger. Peter has Christian eyes but got distracted by the accusations that he was with Jesus (Matthew 26:69–73, Mark 14:66–71, Luke 22:56–60, John 18:25–27) and he denied Him three times.

More on that tomorrow as Matt begins the first weekend series — "Guilt Trips."

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What's your favorite optical illusion?
2. Have you ever felt God's peace in a tight spot?
3. Have you ever shrunk from doing something for God?
4. What might be your spiritual gifts?
5. Has stress ever caused you fail?

Items for prayer: