

CHRISTIAN EYES — WEEK 5

PAUL'S EYES



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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

Paul's path to Jerusalem and then Rome at the end of Acts reveals many things about how he sees the kingdom. Prophecies of abuse and imprisonment do not dissuade him. The prospect of being released from his chains does not motivate him.

And yet, he does fear fearsome things. He's normal.

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.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

All the individual weekly study guides are available for download here:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/itemlist/category/91-deep-studies>

Christian Eyes, Week 5 — Paul's Eyes
Copyright 2020 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 Acts 21:10–14

And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

This is *cold*. The chilling bit is that Paul doesn't doubt Agabus, not one little bit. His reply has nothing to do with thinking Agabus is wrong. In fact, he knows he's right.

"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me." — Acts 20:22–23

But Agabus doesn't have Christian eyes.

Or maybe he does. Agabus isn't the one telling Paul not to go. In fact, his prophesy isn't conditioned on *whether* Paul goes to Jerusalem; he just explains what's about to happen. It's *we and those from that place* [who] *pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem*.

It's Luke who doesn't have Christian eyes. He's admitting it in this passage. He'll develop them by the time he writes Acts, and he'll recall his earlier limitations.

Meanwhile, Paul's Christian eyes (or is it ears?) are fully functional. He's *bound in the spirit to Jerusalem*. So, is having Christian eyes primarily a listening skill?

Or is it more of a submissive spirit?

A submissive spirit is essential to Christian eyes. It like the line, "Who you gonna believe? Me or your lying eyes?" That's what our sinful selves say.

We are masters of denial. Anything we don't want to hear or see, we somehow manage to miss. If it's impossible to miss, we'll somehow manage to not remember it. Or explain it away. Or that's not what God meant. Or that's not what the scripture passage is really saying.

One of the wonderful things about a submissive spirit is that it comes across as heroic. Paul notices that everyone around him is literally *weeping*. It breaks his heart, but not his plans.

Paul's not being brave; he's being obedient.

2 Acts 24:22–26

But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.” So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.

Hoping for a bribe from Paul is both wrong and clueless. So, Felix obviously doesn't have Christian eyes.

But he does have something—*more accurate knowledge of the Way*. This causes him to take Paul seriously, though ineptly, and to treat him much better than normal prisoners are treated.

Felix needs to command the centurion, “*to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.*” Centurions can be very abusive.

So, this isn't an example of Christian eyes, but it displays one of the principles underlying Christian eyes—knowledge affects perception.

Learning about the kingdom of heaven is the first step in developing Christian eyes.

So, our job is to teach.

You might teach unbelievers about the basics of the gospel.

You might teach believers how to see everything in terms of the kingdom.

You might teach children the stories of how things unfolded.

All of these are on the path to Christian eyes.

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that

*‘Seeing they may see and not perceive,
And hearing they may hear and not understand;
Lest they should turn,
And their sins be forgiven them.’ ” — Mark 4:10–12*

3 Acts 25:23, 26:1–3, 6–8, 28, 32

So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. ...

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself."

So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. ...

*And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?
...*

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." ...

Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

It's like they're from two different planets. Agrippa and Bernice (his sister) enter with "great pomp." Everyone is impressed, of course. Then they bring Paul in and he's anything but impressed.

Instead, he gets right to work and does what he always does—advances the gospel. His presentation is supposed to be a defense of his actions, but it's really an explanation of his actions. He's already appealed to Caesar, so there's no point to a legal defense anyway. He's just using this as an opportunity to preach.

He even takes it to Agrippa directly when he says, "*Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?*" Agrippa is smart. He sees right through what Paul's doing and says, "*You almost persuade me to become a Christian.*"

But Paul doesn't want to convert one guy; he wants to convert the whole room. He makes good progress when Agrippa says to Festus, "*This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.*"

The element of surprise has, once again, come in handy.

Paul's "strange" priorities are giving everyone pause. Great pomp doesn't matter to him. Getting out of jail doesn't matter to him. This leaves everyone scratching their heads. In combination with Paul's logic and his evidence, it should draw people to the gospel. As Agrippa said, it *almost* wins him over.

So, the takeaway word from this lesson is, "pause." Before someone can come to Christ, something has to give them pause.

They have to become unsure of their world view and wonder about this other view they're seeing.

4 Acts 27:9–12

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.” Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.

While God occasionally gives Paul supernatural vision, most of the time his vision is regular Christian eyes. This time, it's the latter. He's right when he says, “*Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss,*” but wrong about, “*not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.*” This error shows that this was merely a case of conventional wisdom.

But Paul will ultimately have absolute credibility with everyone on the ship. When, in verse 24, Paul recounts what the angel said—“*Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you*”—they take it as gospel.

The whole ship, especially the centurion and the soldiers, end up obeying Paul's every command (in 27:31–32. 34–38, and 42–44). That saves their lives.

This illustrates an important rule in how to use Christian eyes—credibility is essential. In a sense, Paul has successfully evangelized the whole ship. Even if he hasn't preached the gospel yet (as if) he has already done a terrific job of preparing the soil.

Credibility can be a valuable enhancement in the presentation of the gospel. Your Christian eyes can get people's attention by themselves, but having earned their respect in advance is priceless.

This is one reason charity is so important. Christianity has been associated with charity for 2,000 years. It's been our signature characteristic. Even people who didn't like Christianity at least respected it.

We need to get back to that.

Of course, credibility isn't the only reason charity is important. God's glory is a bigger reason.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” — Matthew 5:14–16

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. — James 1:27

5 Acts 28:14b–15

And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

Paul's afraid. Yes, this is the same Paul to whom the angel had recently said, "*Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.*" (Romans 27:24)

Yes, this is the same Paul who wrote to these Romans, just a few years earlier, "*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— ... And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" (Romans 1:11, 8:28)

Now he's almost there. The brothers come out to meet him, but on seeing them he's not just happy; he's relieved. He *thanked God and took courage*. Why does he need to "take courage"?

Earlier, when the angel told him to not be afraid, he obviously feared for his life. Everyone on the ship feared for their life. Paul had predicted that there would be loss of life if they sailed.

But that's over and he's back on track. What's he worried about now?

The Bible doesn't say, but the fact that he is worried yields an important lesson. Despite some awesome supernatural encouragement, he's still not "as cool as a cucumber."

This demonstrates some of the things that Christian eyes are not. They're not perfect and they're not perfectly confident. Paul may be wondering if his decision to appeal to Caesar was a blunder. Romans 8:28 doesn't say we can't make mistakes.

Paul will later say that he's perfectly willing to die for Christ.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. — Philippians 1:21

That doesn't mean he thinks it'll be fun.

It's OK to be scared.

While our relationship with God gives us certainty in some things, life in Christ is full of surprises—many of them painful. I like to say that Christians should love rollercoasters.

The plot twists God throws at people can be instructive, even amusing, when viewed from a distance. They get a lot more intense close up.

We're called to a close-up relationship.

Questions for reflection or discussion:

1. Have you ever had a fight with yourself over the Lord's leading?
2. Can you think of some acquaintances whose eyes need opening?
3. What Christian behaviors impress folks the most?
4. Is Christianity losing people's respect?
5. Does fear affect your choice of ministry?

Items for prayer: