

CHRISTIAN EYES — WEEK 6

SAINTS' 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**

We get our final lessons in Christian eyes from John the Baptist, St. Patrick, Jan Hus, and Martin Luther. Each was driven by the truths they saw, which were problems that needed correcting.

They were challenged to deliver correction and that endangered, or even ended, their lives.

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 6 — Saints' Eyes
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1 Matthew 3:1–9

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

*“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.’ ”*

Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

John obviously has some supernatural gifts that go beyond simple Christian eyes; he knew who Jesus is even before he was born. Still, some of John’s actions are lessons in Christian eyes. His call to repentance and his criticism of the Pharisees are in that category.

The challenge is figuring out how to apply this to our lives. John’s Christian eyes see the kingdom clearly, even to the point of seeing the hearts of the Pharisees. Can we see like that? Should we ever be this confrontational?

The first question is easy. Yes, we can see like that. Anyone can.

In fact, everyone did. That’s why *Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

John was just saying what everyone knew, but he was the only one willing to say it.

The confrontation question is tougher. John saying, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” wasn’t confrontational, but his calling out the Pharisees and Sadducees was.

That’s not a general model we should follow, because John initiated a public confrontation. The Pharisees and Sadducees just showed up peacefully. Even with people as in need of confrontation as the Pharisees and Sadducees were, John’s approach is not for normal Christians. As we’ll see tomorrow, calling someone out publicly is almost never best. John’s supernatural gifts created an exception to the rule.

The choice to “start something” should never be taken lightly. Avoid snap decisions and get the council of others. As representatives of the kingdom of Heaven, we should always strive to act with class.

Words cannot be unsaid.

2 Mark 6:17–20

For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

This is a good example of how to do confrontation right. But make no mistake, John is about to be executed for doing things right.

Success in the kingdom of Heaven isn't the same as success in this world.

What John does right is take his criticism directly to Herod. *John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."* That's a fact, not John's opinion.

So, we get an essential rule about criticism—be on solid ground logically. Carefully consider whether there is a valid counterargument. If so, tailor your criticism to fit the situation. You may need to soften it up. It may be wiser to just open up a winsome dialogue—“Something's bothering me.”

Still, John is bold in daring to criticize the king. Herod seems to appreciate that. He's interested in what John has to say *and heard him gladly*.

That's an impressive response to criticism. Herod seems to be a stand-up guy.

So, the lesson here comes with a caveat. Criticism should be given directly to the person you're criticizing. Never go “behind someone's back.”

But don't assume they'll take it well.

Jesus's advice on confrontation agrees with this perfectly.

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'” — Matthew 18:15–16

Jesus even gives us the specifics of what to do next if they don't take it well.

Think this through in advance. Confronting people, especially friends, is an important part of kingdom living. But it's rarely simple. Sin continues to infect us all.

Think carefully, whether you're on the sending or receiving end of constructive criticism.

God is glorified when His people do this well.

3 John 4:35

Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

While Christian eyes are a permanent condition, some insights happen in a flash.

In a vision of the night, I saw a man whose name was Victoricus coming as from Ireland with innumerable letters, and he gave me one of them, and I read the beginning of the letter: 'The Voice of the Irish'; and as I was reading the beginning of the letter I seemed at that moment to hear the voice of those who were beside the forest of Focult which is near the western sea, and they were crying as if with one voice: 'We beg you, holy youth, that you shall come and shall walk again among us.' And I was stung intensely in my heart so that I could read no more, and thus I awoke. — Patrick "Confession" 23

An important part of this is not just the vision itself, but that Patrick decided to obey it. That was met with vigorous opposition.

And then I was attacked by a goodly number of elders, who [brought up] my sins against my arduous episcopate. That day in particular I was mightily upset, and might have fallen here and for ever; but the Lord generously speared me, a convert, and an alien, for his name's sake, and he came powerfully to my assistance in that state of being trampled down — Patrick "Confession" 26

Such opposition should never be ignored.

*He who disdains instruction despises his own soul,
But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding. — Proverbs 15:32*

But Patrick got the confirmation he needed. The elders were wrong.

On the other hand, I did not proceed to Ireland of my own accord until I was almost giving up, but through this I was corrected by the Lord, and he prepared me so that today I should be what was once far from me, in order that I should have the care of—or rather, I should be concerned for—the salvation of others, when at that time, still, I was only concerned for myself. — Patrick "Confession" 28

Christian eyes are a great treasure, but let no one say that they're easy.

Patrick was great saint who followed the Lord's leading at great personal risk

Yet paragraph 28 of "Confession" shows that he was a normal sinner, just like you and me. Even after he had the vision, he wasn't sure he should go, and the elders almost talked him out of it.

All of Patrick's "Confession" reads like this. It's only 62 paragraphs and worth your time. Here's a link.

https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#

4 Proverbs 9:7 (ESV)

*Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.*

When you see clearly, you see folly, even when everyone else sees nothing wrong.

That can get you into trouble. History is replete with martyrs whose Christian eyes are what started them down the road to martyrdom.

Jan Hus walked just such a road. He, like Patrick before him and Luther after, saw problems where most saw none (or at least pretended to see none). His betrayal and martyrdom set the stage for the Reformation.

The church had become corrupted and Hus saw that clearly. Power tends to corrupt, and the church hierarchy was no exception. The system of government in the church (and specifically, the selling of indulgences) offended Hus.

But his writings offended the hierarchy even more. Under the pretense of wanting to hear him give an account of his views, he was summoned to the Council of Constance in 1414. The council had promised significant reforms and now promised Hus safe conduct.

Both were lies. Hus was immediately imprisoned upon his arrival and never given a chance to defend himself or his views. He was only given the “opportunity” to recant. He was burned at the stake for heresy on July 6, 1415.

*Evil men do not understand justice,
but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.* — Proverbs 28:5 (ESV)

Hus's ideas didn't die with him. The Hussite wars (1419–1436) attest to that.

The Hussites won and the church was forced to make concessions. Unfortunately, all they did was allow some specific practices desired by the Hussites. Their eyes were not opened.

*When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,
but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.* — Proverbs 28:12 (ESV)

But the story doesn't end there. As a young man, Martin Luther would discover some of Hus's sermons. Luther would later write, "*I was overwhelmed with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill.*"

People also learned from Hus's betrayal. A century after the Council of Constance, Luther was similarly “summoned.” This time everyone was forewarned. That may have helped save Luther from a similar fate.

Thus, in two vastly different ways, Hus made the world ready for the Reformation.

5 Proverbs 3:7, 11:2

*Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.*

*When pride comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble is wisdom.*

Of all the great saints, Martin Luther's may have had the most humble Christian eyes. Though Luther is famous for seeing problems with the church, he saw problems with himself first. At confession Luther would wear priests out, as he droned on and on for hours.

His 95 Theses reflected that attitude. They even suggested that everyone should be like him.

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent ye," He willed the whole life of believers to be one of repentance. — Martin Luther's "95 Theses" Thesis #1

Martin had no idea he was "starting something" when he posted his theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. It was how people typically engaged in academic discussion. You can see that in the preface:

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

But start something he did, and the rest, as they say, is history.

We've studied the Christian eyes of many great saints, but Luther is the most relevant case.

Christian eyes see things as they really are, not as our regular eyes see them. But the main thing that regular eyes don't see is our sin. The primary function of Christian eyes is to reveal that which we most don't want to see—our own fallen nature.

If you are grieved by yourself, if you're haunted by your past, then rejoice. That guilt is the most healthy emotion in the world; it's the hallmark of Christian eyes.

But don't let this news cure you of that guilt. Remember, Luther said that *the whole life of believers* [is] *to be one of repentance*. Never lose that precious sense of guilt and dependence on the Lord.

You are saved.

You are justified.

You are NOT innocent.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever confronted a fellow Christian?
2. Have you ever been confronted by a fellow Christian?
3. Have you ever discussed a calling with a friend?
4. Whose writings have you "discovered"?
5. How can you nurture your own Christian eyes?

Items for prayer: