
Looking At What You Cannot See

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— Keith R. Blades

24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

(Romans 8:24–25)

With these words the apostle Paul concludes the first doctrine to our sonship edification. A doctrine that had its beginning back in verse 16, and that conforms perfectly with how a father begins to educate his son after having adopted him. Just as a natural father begins his son's education and edification with the knowledge of his inheritance and its implications on his life, so also does God our Father begin our Godly education and edification with the doctrine of our inheritance as His "sons." By means of this particular information and knowledge we receive the fundamental and foundational Godly viewpoint and perspective on our lives that our Father wants us to have, and that we need to have, as we begin to live as God's "sons" in this present dispensation of His grace.

Specifically, though, by these closing words Paul brings home the doctrine's designed impact on our thinking by declaring the issue of the salvation that we receive when the knowledge of our inheritance with its "hope" effectually works within us as God has purposed for it to do. And indeed we do receive a salvation. Salvation, that is, from being adversely affected by "the sufferings of this present time" that come upon us as we await both the conclusion of this present dispensation and our "manifestation" as "the sons of God." Instead of being adversely affected by

any such "sufferings" and only being able to respond to them as natural men do, we are "saved" from that situation by being enabled to respond to them differently and in a Godly manner.

Through the effectual working within us of the doctrine of verses 16–23 we are able to view any of "the sufferings of this present time" from the perspective of what our Father is now doing in His plan and purpose; and likewise from the perspective of the inheritance that we have in our Father's plan and purpose and the role that such "sufferings" have in it. Therefore we are enabled to view such sufferings exactly the same way that our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ view them. And when this is our perspective and viewpoint, we can contentedly endure such "sufferings of this present time," as we "with patience wait for" the fulfillment of our "hope" as God's "sons." A "hope," as Paul says, which we not only do not yet "see," but due to the realm in which it pertains we also cannot now see.¹

Now this first doctrine to our sonship edification is fundamental, foundational, and essential to our lives as God's "sons" today; both at the outset of our edification and on a day-to-day basis thereafter. However this is true not only of the overall doctrine itself, but also it is especially true of its closing words regarding the effectual working within us of knowledge about things "that we see not." This is because the knowledge of our "hope" is not the only thing God tells us about "that we see not." It is not the only thing that we are to presently look at with 'the eyes of our understanding' and not with our physical eyes. Instead this issue of operating upon the

knowledge of our ‘not-yet-seen’ hope is just the beginning for us.

A Different Set of Eyes

As we progress on in our sonship edification we continue to encounter more and more knowledge regarding things that we cannot see with our physical eyes. And as we are confronted with them, it does not take long before we become aware that our sonship edification and lives are actually replete with such things. Accordingly it quickly becomes apparent that our Father has designed for us to do most of our ‘seeing’ with *a different set of eyes* — i.e. with ‘the eyes of our understanding.’ This means that on a regular basis we need to be looking at, and occupied with, things that we cannot see with our physical eyes but only with our mind’s eyes, as our Father teaches us to understand, appreciate, and operate upon things that are outside the realm of our natural visual awareness and perception. Indeed so much so is this the case with us that later on in II Corinthians the apostle Paul puts this issue into the form of the ‘standard-operating-maxim’ that it is for us when he says,...

7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

(II Corinthians 5:7)

Moreover this issue of Paul constantly teaching us to operate upon the knowledge of things that we cannot see is something that even Bible scoffers and critics perceive. For among other things Paul is often criticized and/or ridiculed by them for ‘taking numerous flights of fancy’ or ‘wild excursions into the imagination’ as he preaches about things for which ‘there is no empirical evidence.’ Of all the Biblical writers, we are told, it takes ‘the most blind faith and casting away of one’s reason to believe what Paul says.’ Indeed ‘he seems to relish in requiring blind faith.’

Though such comments come from Bible critics and opponents, they are astute observations

nonetheless. For though they often assign what Paul preaches to mere ‘fancy’ or ‘imagination,’ they do correctly recognize that much of what he teaches involves things “that we see not.” They rightly assess the situation when they perceive that especially with Paul ‘seeing is not believing, but believing is seeing.’

And indeed this is the situation with us. Because of the way in which God is dealing with us today, as well as the realm in which His purpose with us pertains, it is only natural that we are taught about many things of which we cannot see. Hence, as Paul says, “we walk by faith, not by sight.” We walk, therefore, looking at things which we cannot see by looking at them with ‘the eyes of our understanding’; believing that what God says about them is true, even though by natural sight we can see no evidence of them.

Characteristic, but not Exclusive

Now though the issue of ‘walking by faith, not by sight’ is designed by God to be a characteristic of our sonship lives, the opportunity to do so is not exclusive to us in this present dispensation. In God’s program with Israel He clearly did covenant to do much with His nation on the basis of their physical sight.² Hence it can be rightly said that they did, (and yet will), ‘walk by sight’ to a great degree. However, as Hebrews 11:1ff makes evident, there were also opportunities for the saints to operate on the basis of faith in things that they too could not see. Hence Hebrews 11 begins by saying,...

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

(Hebrews 11:1-2)

As the chapter goes on to set forth, the elders indeed did have opportunities to operate on the basis of faith in “things not seen.” Moreover this will especially be so for the members of the remnant of Israel when God resumes His program

with Israel. For even though there will still be much for them to physically “see” and go by during that time, they will also have the greatest opportunity that God gives to the Israel of God to walk by faith in things that they cannot see. For this reason Hebrews 11 teaches them what it does, preparing them for this very thing.

Nevertheless it is with us today, (God’s “new creature,” the church the body of Christ), that ‘walking by faith, not by sight’ is to be so commonplace that it is characteristic. For this reason right from the outset of our sonship edification we are taught to operate upon a hope “that we see not.” And then from this point on we are taught more and more to look at, and operate upon, an increasing number of things that we cannot see.

A Few Examples

In connection with drawing attention to this issue and underscoring its essential on-going function in our lives as God’s “sons,” note just a few of the many examples that we encounter as we progress through the curriculum for our sonship edification.

First notice that after our Godly viewpoint and perspective on life is established within us through the effectual working of Romans 8:16–25, our Father immediately tells us about something else that we cannot see with our physical eyes, but only with ‘the eyes of our understanding.’

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

(Romans 8:26–27)

This marvelous provision that the Spirit makes for us is also something for which we have no empirical evidence. Not only do we not see it when it occurs, we also do not feel it, hear it, or sense it in anyway. In fact if our Father did not tell us about it, we never would know it did take place or even could take place. Hence this “help” from the Spirit, (which ensures that we can enjoy unperturbed constancy in our sonship prayers on those occasions when “we know not what we should pray for as we ought”), is also something that we only ‘see’ with ‘the eyes of our understanding.’ Hence we know it occurs, and we rely upon it when needed, simply because our Father says that it takes place. Any and all lack of empirical evidence notwithstanding.

Now as we progress on in our sonship edification, and eventually begin to experience “the sufferings of Christ” that Paul speaks about and deals with in II Corinthians, things really begin to ‘heat up,’ so to speak. Things that we cannot see become more and more the issue for us. In fact just about every category of consolation and comfort that “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” provides for us to operate upon as we partake of the “sufferings of Christ” has its own ‘cannot be seen’ component to it. In other words an integral and essential part of the comfort that our Father gives to us, pertains to something that neither our physical eyes, nor other senses, can detect or confirm to be true.

Hence benefiting from the effectual working of the comfort, (so that we are able to endure ‘the suffering of Christ’ to God’s honor and glory), requires that we look at something specific that we cannot see. And not only this, but benefiting from our Father’s comfort frequently requires that we do this in the face of the fact that we are constantly receiving extremely distressing, discomfiting, and even unnerving testimony of a contrary nature from the things that we do physically see and from the things that we do physically sense. This, therefore, makes it so that the only way in which we can benefit from our

Father's comfort is to be unwaveringly looking at what we cannot see; thinking about and evaluating our situation solely on the basis of what we are taught to 'see' with 'the eyes of our understanding.'

As an example of this note what Paul says comfort-wise regarding the particular 'suffering of Christ' that he describes and deals with in II Corinthians 4.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

(II Corinthians 4:16-18)

By nature, (i.e. operating upon what he physically saw and felt), the 'perishing' of Paul's "outward man" constantly testified something discomfiting and grievous to him as he experienced this particular 'suffering of Christ.' And while what he physically saw and felt brought the weight of its unpleasant testimony to bear upon him, the natural tendency was to induce him to "faint." However, as Paul says, he did not "faint." For instead of operating upon what he physically saw and/or felt, Paul did something else. In his "inward *man*" he operated upon something "not seen" that God had told him about.

Wherefore instead of 'fainting' under the weight of the affliction's natural unpleasantness and grief, Paul not only continued on, but he continued on with the affliction now being judged by him to be "light," and the weight he now bears he judged to be "a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory." And this Paul did by looking "at the things which are not seen," and not at "the

things which are seen."

Now if looking at what we cannot see can be said to 'heat up' as our sonship edification progresses on, then it aptly can be described as 'boiling over' when it advances on into the greater edification attainments that we acquire, for example, in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. For at this stage in our sonship edification not only are we taught about so much more that we cannot physically see or sense, but also we are taught that our "conversation" is exalted into heaven itself, and that we need to understand, appreciate, and be occupied with the issue of its *unseen* impact in that realm. For this cause when Paul warns and reproveth the Colossians about being on guard against the specific tactics from the policy of evil that are designed to thwart their unseen heavenly impact, among other things he says to them,...

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

(Colossians 3:1-4)

An Essential Characteristic

Without a doubt, therefore, 'looking at what we cannot see,' or 'walking by faith, not by sight,' is not only designed by God to be characteristic of us today, it is an *essential* characteristic for us to operate upon. It is an integral, indispensable virtue in our sonship lives, which only becomes more and more of an issue, (and so more and more of a necessity for us), as our godly edification increases and matures.

Consequently we cannot properly live as “sons” to our Father’s honor and glory, or to the fulness of the effectual working within us of His curriculum for our “godly edifying,” if we walk by sight or senses, and not by faith. The plain fact is that the nature of our sonship edification demands ‘walking by faith,’ with the result that little or nothing beyond partial establishment can take place without it.

Therefore, as stated earlier, right from the outset of our sonship edification we are immediately taught to look at something “that we see not.” And when we actually do look at what we cannot see by means of the effectual working of Romans 8:16–25 within us; and when we do operate upon our unseen “hope” as we experience “the sufferings of this present time”; an additional and far-reaching accomplishment is achieved within us. For then it is that our different set of eyes — the ‘eyes of our understanding’ — begin to take their place of importance and dominance in our lives. Then it is that they and what they ‘see’ start to be given precedence by us over the things that we physically see and sense.

Furthermore when this occurs, the ‘eyes of our understanding’ are then able to begin to focus our thoughts, our attention, and our heart’s desires upon an entire realm of things that we either cannot see, or cannot yet see. And as ‘the eyes of our understanding’ do this they provide for us as “sons” to be able to live with our Father the full scope of our sonship lives; even to the point of not only having our conversation in heaven, but also being able to ‘see’ its impact there.

An Eye Test

How is it, therefore, with you? How well do ‘the eyes of your understanding’ function? May it be that they at least function well in accordance with the beginning of your sonship edification, and that you therefore clearly and constantly look at your ‘hope that you see not’ when it comes to responding to any of “the sufferings of this

present time” that you experience.

However in view of the fact that this is only the initial functioning of ‘the eyes of your understanding,’ may it also be that your range of vision and field of view both increase and sharpen in perception as your sonship edification progresses on, and as our Father calls upon you to look more and more at things that you cannot see. With the result being that you not only do look at them, and do ‘see’ them, but also that you are captivated by them, even enamored with them, and so you set your affections on them. — *K.R. Blades*

¹ For a more detailed examination of Romans 8:16–25, see the Second Quarter 2002 edition of *The Enjoy The Bible Quarterly*.

² Cf., for example, Exodus 34:10.