

- b. In verse 6:22 Jesus made what appears at first glance to be yet another abrupt transition into an entirely different topic: after insisting upon the need for His disciples to lay up treasure in heaven, He immediately observed that “*the eye is the lamp of the body.*” But what seems to be an unrelated subject actually serves to reinforce the primary thesis of the whole context, namely the fact that earthly-mindedness is pervasive as well as universal; it defines and determines every aspect of human existence in alienation from the life and mind of God. It is not a geographical or cultural phenomenon, neither is it restricted to certain components or spheres of life. Earthly-mindedness is the way a person perceives, thinks, judges and responds when he exists apart from God, isolated within his own life and mind; *it is the spiritual darkness that engulfs a person when he exists in personal autonomy and unbelief.* This imagery is common in the Old Testament and would have been familiar to Jesus’ audience (cf. Isaiah 59:1-10, 50:10-11; also Isaiah 32:1-3, 35:1-5, 42:1-18 with John 9:35-39; ref. also Deuteronomy 28:28-29; Psalm 82:1-8, 107:10-11). They would have known immediately what He meant by His metaphor of the eye as the lamp of the body.

This is a powerful and effective metaphor, first because it connected Jesus’ instruction about His kingdom with Old Testament symbolism and promise, but also because it communicates crucial truths about man’s spiritual blindness and the consequences it has on the way he perceives and lives life. Like any parable or biblical metaphor, Jesus intended His words to speak to the spiritual condition and need of His audience, but He accomplished that goal by drawing upon physical, natural phenomena with which they were well acquainted. The physical counterpart – here, the metaphor of the *eye* – serves to communicate spiritual truth, and this means that one must begin with the phenomenon of physical sight if he is to rightly grasp Jesus’ ultimate, spiritual point.

- 1) The first thing to observe is that the eye – the physical organ of sight – is the portal for light passing into the body. It is not the *source* of light, but only the aperture that allows whatever light impinges upon it from the outside to gain entrance into the body.
- 2) Second, the eye doesn’t actually “see” anything. That is, it doesn’t decipher or discern any physical object; it merely receives the light energy that comes to it and transmits it by converting it to electro-chemical energy. The actual content of that light is transferred neurologically to the brain where it is deciphered and an electro-chemical “image” is formed.

And so, crucial to Jesus’ analogy is the fact that the eye is neither the *source* of light nor the instrument for its *discernment* and *appraisal*. Nonetheless, the eyes are the “lamp” of the body, for without them light is kept entirely outside of a person, making it impossible for him to even detect its presence, let alone process and discern its content. The man whose eyes have been plucked out may be surrounded by the most blinding light, and yet that light will not penetrate him; his body remains entirely ignorant of its presence, “full of darkness.”

The eye, as all of the senses, is essential to establishing contact with the outside world. Indeed, if a person could somehow be stripped of his five senses he would lose all awareness of *everything* that exists outside of himself; he would be left in the absolute isolation of dead, silent blackness.

- 3) A third observation is that, though the eyes are independent organs (and sight is an independent bodily function), they operate as part of an *organism*. This means that the eyes' proper function or dysfunction profoundly affects the entire man – his mind as well as his body. First of all, the five senses work together to provide access to and understanding of the world outside of the creature itself. The brain draws upon all five in concert with one another, and this means that a person's loss of sight will affect the other four. It's not that any physical change occurs to the remaining senses, but they become more sensitive and prominent in their operation as the brain turns to them to compensate for the loss of vision.

But the eyes also impact other parts of the body such that their dysfunction impedes the proper functioning of those other elements (physical and mental). So, for instance, a person's hands, legs, and feet may be perfectly sound, but, if his eyes don't work, the easy, natural function of those members is compromised and their well-being jeopardized. Every time a blind man stretches out his hands he is risking their injury, and, though he may be ever so careful in measuring his steps, he is in constant danger of stumbling and falling. He may have all confidence that he is in a safe circumstance while, in reality, he is in grave danger.

For all of the above reasons, it is evident that a person's *perception, appraisal, and use* of light are absolutely dependent upon the proper functioning of his eyes. To the extent that his eyes are "bad," the content of the light coming into them is distorted and rendered unprofitable (if not dangerous); in the case of blindness, it is lost altogether. Unless the eyes are able to properly receive, process and transmit the light energy available to them, it doesn't matter if that light is as full and radiant as the noonday sun; the man himself remains "in the dark," incapable of deriving any usefulness or benefit from it. The "meaning" contained in the light – that is, the revelation of physical reality which light energy conveys – is lost upon him; as far as he is concerned, those things do not even exist.

In summary, a person whose eyes are not sound is unable to avail himself of the light that impinges upon him. As a result, *things known only through light are completely unavailable to him*. So, for instance, the man born blind has no capacity to grasp the notion of color, let alone discern or distinguish a particular color. And no matter how hard one might try, it is impossible to explain or otherwise communicate color to such a person. *The man born without the faculty of sight is left with no true conception or knowledge of the realm of reality that is visually perceived and comprehended. More importantly, there is no absolutely no remedy to his incapacity except the restoration of his sight.*

All the above observations – which culminate in this summary one – provide the necessary foundation for understanding Jesus’ instruction in this passage. His concern was clearly with spiritual matters, and each of the preceding physical considerations points to a spiritual counterpart. But basic to all of those correspondences is the Bible’s use of the eye as a metaphor for spiritual insight and understanding – divine as well as human (cf. Genesis 3:1-7, 6:8; Exodus 21:7-8; Numbers 24:3-5, 15-16; Deuteronomy 7:16, 19:15-21; Job 42:5; Isaiah 64:4; Ezekiel 5:11, 7:4-9; etc.).

- Just as the man whose physical eye is sound is able to receive, discern, and profit from the light that comes to him, so the man with a sound spiritual “eye” will be characterized by a body “*full of light*” (6:22).

“Truth is the light of the mind; and the faculty which apprehends truth, howsoever it be denominated, is the eye of the mind. If this mental eye be sound, the whole inner man is full of light. If we have just views, if we have a clear perception, and a firm belief of the truth, then all the powers of our nature will be influenced by this, and perform their various functions properly - our desire, our affections, our active exertions, will be what they ought to be.” (John Brown)

- On the other hand, like the person who is physically blind, one who is spiritually blind is unable to make profitable use of the spiritual light that surrounds him and seeks to gain entrance into him and convey its truth to him. This is the condition of all human beings as they make their entrance into the world: Their minds are bound over to empty and vain conceptions and their reasoning is dysfunctional because they are “*darkened in their understanding,*” being “*excluded from the life of God*” (ref. Ephesians 4:17-19; cf. also 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 5:1-8).

This is precisely the meaning of Jesus’ declaration that the man whose eye is “bad” (unsound or diseased) is “*full of darkness.*” No matter how much of the light of God and His truth is brought to bear upon the minds of the spiritually blind, they remain in the darkness. To such ones, the effulgent glory of God that so transparently fills the world – and which has now found its focal point in the person of Jesus Christ – remains invisible (or at least distorted beyond recognition). Having blinded minds, they neither rightly perceive nor discern “*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” (ref. 2 Corinthians 4:1-4).

Being familiar with the Old Testament scriptures, Jesus’ Jewish listeners already understood the biblical truth of spiritual blindness, but it was important that they realize its gravity (6:23b): “*If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*” The man who is physically blind has a very real disability, but it pertains strictly to the natural realm and so affects him only in that arena and to that extent.

But the man who is spiritually blind is excluded from access to and participation in the ultimate, everlasting spiritual realm. *If physical blindness is distressing and debilitating, spiritual blindness is catastrophic:* The former is limited in its scope and duration and can be compensated for; the latter is all-encompassing and everlasting and there is no human or natural faculty or resource that can compensate for it, let alone overcome it.

Spiritual blindness leaves a person “earth-bound,” confined within his own psyche and so relegated to earthly-mindedness. The one whose “*whole body is full of darkness*” – the one whose apparent “inner light” is actually spiritual darkness – is constrained to “*lay up treasures on earth,*” however spiritual and enlightened he may believe himself to be. The person who is physically blind is incapable of deluding himself about his condition; the spiritually blind man rarely perceives his true condition. Quite the opposite, many such persons are fully convinced that they possess superior spiritual vision (ref. John 9:1-41).

Jesus wanted His hearers to understand the gravity of spiritual blindness, but, more than that, *He intended for them to recognize that they, like the Gentiles, suffered from this grave and desperate condition.* Regardless of their covenant heritage and identity and doctrinal and practical conformity to the Law of Moses, the sons of Israel were just as devoted to the god of mammon as the Gentiles. And where men serve this pseudo-god, they cannot serve the true God (6:24).

The proof of this contention is the fact that mammon is the god of the earthly-minded man. Mammon is often regarded as synonymous with money, but the term actually refers more broadly to anything in which a person puts his confidence as being able to secure his well-being or enhance his life. Money is an obvious expression of mammon, but it has virtually limitless embodiments. Moreover, mammon isn’t limited to the tangible and material. In every human culture, multitudes seek their personal well-being (if not their earthly profit) in their spiritual faith and practice (including Christianity). While some put their confidence and hope in money and the things it can procure, many more look to religion to secure their well-being, not only in this life, but the one to come.

Given what it is, it is obvious that mammon is the god of every human being as he exists in estrangement from the living God. Alienated from their Creator and isolated within their own minds, men are compelled to seek their own well-being in things/realities in accordance with their own thoughts and sensibilities. Even when they put their confidence in deity, both their conception of deity and the way they interact with it are grounded in their own self-referential speculations.

Fallen man is “earthly-minded,” and the earthly-minded are constrained to seek treasure suitable to their condition, namely, “treasure on the earth.” A person’s earthly-mindedness insures that *mammon* will be his god and *magic* will be his religion, whatever his particular religious doctrine and practice. Until they realized this, the sons of Israel had no hope of inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

These truths explain the absolutism of Jesus' pronouncement that **no one** can serve God and mammon (literally, "*No one, without exception, has the power or capacity to serve two lords... Absolutely no one is able to serve God and mammon*"): Earthly-mindedness and heavenly-mindedness are mutually exclusive conditions and each has its own god. At the heart of the gospel of the kingdom is the truth that there are *two realms* ("*kingdoms*") of human existence (that is, two ways of conceiving and interacting with reality) and *two gods*, each of whom rules over his respective kingdom (regardless of how a given person or culture may conceive and serve its particular "gods").

Beyond that, these two gods claim radical and exclusive allegiance; a person can (and will) serve one or the other, and will do so with full devotion. Jesus highlighted these truths by employing terms that express the most extreme dichotomy: Every human being will *love* the one god and *hate* the other; he will *cling* to the one with full and unwavering loyalty and hold the other in *contempt*.

And so the two entities competing for human loyalty aren't God and wealth: A person can live a life of absolute self-denial and renounce all worldly possessions and still be guilty of serving the god of mammon. On the other hand, a person can have great earthly wealth and be a true servant of the living God, free of devotion to mammon. Thus Paul didn't call upon wealthy Christians to divest themselves of all their money; rather he instructed them to be "rich in good works," fixing their confidence and hope on God rather than their earthly resources (1 Timothy 6:17-19; cf. Luke 12:13-21). *If Christians would maintain single-minded devotion to Him, their perception and use of their wealth would take care of itself.*

The marrow of Jesus' life witness and instruction – epitomized in the Sermon on the Mount – is that, in the present age of fulfillment, the kingdom of heaven is juxtaposed with the kingdom of this world (the latter finding extension and expression in the various human kingdoms existing at any given time). Each of these two kingdoms exists in its own right without any essential overlap or shared jurisdiction. They are ordered according to contradicting definitions of reality and principles of human existence and purpose and each is governed by a different ruler who claims exclusive allegiance. *These things provide insight into why Jesus could speak of absolute transference from one kingdom to another while also calling His disciples to live in this world.*

The sons of the kingdom have been delivered from the domain of darkness and translated into Christ's kingdom (Colossians 1:13) by His taking them out of this world and joining them to Himself (John 15:19; cf. Romans 6:1-11). At the same time, they continue to inhabit the same earth in the context of the same temporal lives. A person's liberation from the kingdom of this world doesn't remove him *out* of the world; rather, it sanctifies his life *in* the world. The world and its components and patterns aren't altered; it is the man himself who is transformed. He is delivered from his earthly-mindedness and given the mind of Christ, so that he perceives, understands and lives in the world in a new way (Titus 1:15).