

THE EYE OF FAITH

By Arthur W. Pink

“I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee” (Job 42:5).

What did Job signify by this? Obviously his words are not to be understood literally. No, by employing a common figure of speech, he meant that the mists of unbelief (occasioned by self-righteousness) had now been dispelled, and faith perceived the being of God as a glorious and living reality. “Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord” (Psalm 25:15), by which is meant that his faith was constantly in exercise. Of Moses it is said that “he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27), that is, his heart was sustained through faith's being occupied with the mighty God.

Faith is frequently represented in Scripture under the metaphor of bodily sight. Our Lord said of the great patriarch, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56), meaning that his faith looked forward to the day of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Paul was commissioned unto the Gentiles to “open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18); or, in other words, to be the Divine instrument of their conversion through preaching to them the Word of Faith. To some of his erring children he wrote, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently (plainly) set forth, crucified among you” (Galatians 3:1).

Now what we wish to point out in this article is, that when scripture speaks of faith under the notion of bodily sight, its writers were doing something more than availing themselves of a pertinent and suitable figure of speech. The Author of Scripture is the One who first formed the eye—that marvelous organ of vision—and without a shadow of doubt He so fashioned it as to strikingly adumbrate in the visible that which now plays so prominent a part in the Christian's dealings with the invisible. Everything in the material world shadows forth some great reality in the spiritual realm, as we should perceive had we but sufficient wisdom to discern the fact. A wide field is here opened for observation and meditation, but we shall now confine ourselves to a single example, namely, the eye of the body as it symbolizes the faith of the heart.

1. The eye is a passive organ. The eye does not send out a light from itself, nor does it give anything unto the objects it beholds—what can the eye communicate to the sun, moon, and stars, when it gazes upon them! No, the eye merely receives the print or image of them into the mind (on the retina, which is then transmitted to the brain) without adding anything to them. Just so is it with faith: it gives nothing unto God, or to what it beholds in the Word of His grace. It simply receives or takes them into the heart as they are presented to the soul's view in the light of the Divine revelation. What did the bitten Israelites communicate unto the brazen serpent when they looked unto it, and were healed? As little do we add unto Christ, when we “look” unto Him and are saved (Isaiah 45:22).

2. The eye is a directing organ. The man that has the light of day and his eyes open can see his way, and is not so likely to stumble into ditches or fall into a precipice as a blind man, or one who walks at nighttime. So it is with faith: “The way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble,” but “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:19, 18). Of Christians it is said that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). By “looking off unto Jesus” (faith's viewing our Exemplar) we are enabled to run the race which is set before us.

3. The eye is a very quick organ, taking up things at a great distance. Within a fraction of a moment I can turn my gaze from things lying on the ground and focus it upon the mountains which are many miles away; nay, more, I can look away altogether from the things of earth and mount up among the stars, and in a second view the entire expanse of the heavens. What an optical marvel is that! Equally wonderful is the power of faith: it is indeed a quick-sighted grace, taking up things at a great distance, as the faith of the patriarchs did, who saw the things promised “afar off” (Hebrews 11:13). So too, in a moment faith may look back to an eternity past and view the everlasting springs of electing love, active on its behalf before the foundations of the earth were laid, and then, in the same breath, it can turn itself towards an eternity yet to come, and take a view of the hidden glories of an invisible world within the veil.

4. The eye, though it be little, is a very capacious organ. The man that has the light of day and has his eyes open may see all that comes with the range of his vision: he may look around and see things behind, forward and view things ahead, downward upon the waters in a well or a stream at the bottom of a deep ravine, upwards and gaze upon bodies in the distant heavens. So is it with faith: it extends itself unto everything that lies within the vast compass of God's Word. It takes knowledge of things in the distant past, it also apprehends things that are yet to come; it looks into Hell, and penetrates into Heaven. It is able to discern the vanity of the world all around us.

It is true that there may be a genuine faith that takes in but little of the light of Divine revelation at first. Yet here again the earthly adumbration accurately shadows forth this spiritual truth. The eye of an infant takes in the light and perceives external objects, but with a good deal of weakness and confusion, until as it grows more its vision extends further and further. So it is with the eye of faith. At first, the light of spiritual knowledge is but dim: the babe in Christ is unable to see afar off. But as faith grows deeper and deeper into the Divine mysteries, until it comes at length to be swallowed up on open vision (John 17:24).

5. The eye is a very assuring faculty. Of the five bodily senses, this is the most convincing. What are we more sure of, than what we see with our eyes! Some fools may seek to persuade themselves that matter is a mental delusion, but no one in his right mind will believe them. If a man sees the sun shining in the heavens, he knows that it is day. In like manner, faith is a grace which carries in its very nature a great deal of certainty: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Sceptics may deny the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, but when the eye of faith has gazed upon its supernatural beauties, the point is settled once for all. Others may regard the Christ of God as a pious myth, but once the saint has really beheld the Lamb of God, it can say "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

6. The eye is an impressing organ: what we see, leaves an impression upon our minds, that is why we need to pray often "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Psalm 119:37); that is why the prophet declared "mine eye affecteth mine heart" (Lamentations 3:51). If a man looks steadily at the sun for a few moments an impression of the sun is left in his eye, even though he turn his eyes away from it, or shut them. In like manner, real faith leaves an impression of the Sun of righteousness upon the heart: "they looked unto Him, and were lightened" (Psalm 34:5). Even more definite is 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." As the mighty power of Christ will, in a coming day, transform the bodies of His people from mortality to life and from dishonour to glory, so also does the Holy Spirit now exert a moral transforming power on the character of those who are His, and that by calling faith into exercise, the activity of which more and more conforms the soul to the image of God's Son.

7. The eye is a wondrous organ. Those who are competent to express an opinion, affirm that this particular member is the most curious and remarkable of any part of the human body: there is much of the wisdom and power of the Creator to be discovered in the formation of the visive faculty. So too faith is a grace that is curiously and wondrously wrought in the soul. There is more of the wisdom and power of the Divine Workman discovered in the formation of the grace of faith than in any other part of the new creature. Thus we read of the "work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11), yea, that the same exceeding great and mighty power which was put forth by God in the raising of Christ from the dead is exerted upon and within them that believe (Ephesians 1:19).

8. The eye of the body is a very tender thing: it is soon hurt and easily damaged. A very tiny cinder will cause pain and make it weep—and it is very striking to note that that is the very way to recovery—it weeps out the dust or mote that gets into it. So too faith is a most delicate grace, thriving best in a pure conscience: hence the apostle speaks of "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:9). The lively actings of faith are soon marred by the dust of sin, or by the vanities of the world getting into the heart where it is seated. And where ever true faith is, if it be hurt by sin, it vents itself in a way of godly sorrow.

N.B. For most of the above we are indebted to a sermon preached by Ebon. Erskine in 1740.