

# THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,  
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in  
the house.

Matthew 5:15

## From The Editor's Desk.

Optometrists often speak of *visual acuity* and the dictionary definition of **Acuity is: Sharpness: keenness of hearing, sight, or intellect, sensitive: finely tuned and able to sense minor differences, distinctions, or details, very eager and willing, quick to understand things.**

Three articles relating to 'Vision' are presented in this issue and they made me aware of how much we need our vision or eyesight to live in a society where much of our experiences and enjoyment of life is gathered through our vision. There also are dangers there, in that we may allow our vision to dwell on those things that can lead us into sin. (Lust of the eyes; 1 John 2:16) Vision is however but one of our five physical senses that we need to function well on a daily basis. Scripture refers to each of our senses Matthew 13:16 – eyes and ears, John 20:17 – touch, Luke 14:24 – taste and Leviticus 26:31 – smell. These are not the only verses referring to the senses but they give an indication of how they should be used.

In all instances when we use our senses we generally use two or more at the same time, in turn they give a message to our brain where the input is processed (our mind) and acted upon either in a positive or a negative way. You may well say 'Yes, I know all that' but how many of us ever ponder on what it takes to process the input to the stage where we can use the information in a God honouring way. I believe that we need to exercise that sharpness that the word acuity stands for, keenness of hearing, sight and intellect. Matthew 13:13-15 gives a very good insight as to the result of not exercising sharpness in the use of our senses. It can and will lead to either not being converted (saved) or losing our salvation because we have grown dull in our discerning the will of God for our lives.

We are also admonished by scriptures (2 Peter 3:14) to be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. How can we be 'found of Him' as above, if we fail to exercise with diligence our five senses with the characteristics found in the definition of acuity. Romans 10:17 is not just about the physical act of hearing but about exercising all our senses to be able to live daily the life that God has called each of us to.

May you be encouraged and challenged to exercise sharpness in all areas of life so that your faith may be strengthened and God glorified.

*JvL.*

**MINISTER'S CORNER.****Where There is No Vision the People Perish.**

*Bro. Daryl Bair, Antrim Mennonite Church, PA.*

Our text in Proverbs 29:18 implies that there is a possibility of living our lives without sight — blind, as it were — blindly living, going on day after day without comprehending the will of God. The text here is given here in the form of a warning.

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” We understand this to be a very serious subject. It is really a life or death matter — this thing of whether we have vision or not. It implies that those who would find themselves in this condition of having no vision will experience loss. They are in danger of perishing eternally. Therefore, it is a serious matter. This text tells us that our souls hang in the balance on this question of vision. What is vision? “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” I think we understand vision as (at least in the Old Testament setting) as the light from heaven — the heavenly light that shines on the issues of mankind. The inference here is if someone who is responsible for communicating heavenly light — the will of God if you please — fails in that responsibility, someone will perish. There will be loss — loss of individual lives, loss of churches, of groups, of movements, we would say, where there is no vision. In the Old Testament the prophet was primarily responsible for communicating this vision, this light from heaven to man. If he failed somebody perished. It reminds us of that Scripture in 1 Samuel 3:1, “And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” Someone was not communicating the will of God, or understanding the will of God. There was loss.

*I would like to look at this subject in a broader term to use the word vision as meaning spiritual perception, the ability to understand truth and to be aware of the spiritual issues that are at stake in our lives — the awareness of spiritual realities. As I already intimated, it is possible for us to lose that vision. In fact, it is likely at times, unless we are very diligent as we live our lives. We can become absorbed in the daily grind of human living and go on day after day and lose our sense of responsibility and accountability and awareness of spiritual realities. This can happen to us and*

it does happen to us. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “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.” The Christian life is a life of faith, of being able to see the things that are not readily seen by the natural man. That is vision. *Vision also, is the ability to see ahead, to see beyond the present.* It is the ability to understand how my actions and choices today will affect my life down the road, and will affect others in the future. There is a sense in which we are living our life today in light of what will happen in the future. Vision is that ability to understand the connection between the present and what yet lies ahead for us.

*In Hebrews 11 we have a list of individuals who possessed this kind of vision, the understanding, and the awareness of how their decisions today affected the future.* We could well look at each of these as individuals. I would like to read Hebrews 11:13 because I think this verse describes for us the kind of spiritual vision that we need. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” There was that ability to see ahead and to grasp spiritual realities today in light of what lay ahead yet. It was that vision that enabled these individuals to live faithfully today in spite of adversity and difficult circumstances because they had a vision for the future. *I would like to notice Hebrews 12:2 which describes Jesus’ vision.* “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” He could live and endure the present because He had a vision. He had a long range view. The ability to see ahead was what kept our Lord going in the difficulties that He faced. *This vision that we are talking about is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.* It is the Holy Spirit that gives us this kind of spiritual understanding and awareness. On the day of Pentecost Peter said that this coming of the Holy Spirit will cause your young men to dream dreams and your old men to see visions. I think that relates a little bit to our subject. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who gives us a spiritual understanding. Vision is more than simply head knowledge. It is something that burns in your heart. It is something that drives you and motivates you. That is a vision. We say sometimes a person may have a vision for a certain project and it might be a very diffi-

cult project. It is a burning in his heart and he pursues that vision and he sees the project accomplished. That is vision. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John 16, in relation to the coming of the Holy Spirit, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but . . . he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:13, 15). The work of the Spirit in our lives is to give us the understanding that we need. In the Old Testament we could say the prophet was responsible for the vision. Today, each of us, being possessors of the Holy Spirit, has the ability within us to understand and to grasp spiritual truth. The work of the Holy Spirit spawns individuals who are thinking people, not individuals who are simply living day after day headed for the future not knowing where. We could ask, “Do not thinking people become individualists?” Well no, not when the Holy Spirit is guiding our thinking and leading us in the ways of truth. It is the work of the Spirit to give us an understanding of where we are.

I would like to think of a number of areas of vision. I have called them *Areas of Essential Vision That Save Us*, because where there is no vision the people perish. What must we know and see in order to be saved?

1) *It is very necessary and essential for every Christian to have a vision of God.* We must have a vision of God, and a personal encounter with God. We need a vision like Isaiah had in Isaiah 6:1 “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” There were those heavenly beings with six wings and they cried “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). Isaiah saw the Lord. He saw the holiness of God and he saw the sovereignty of God. He saw the glory and majesty of God. When he saw the Lord, then he also saw himself. Then, he also saw the needs around him.

When he saw the Lord it humbled him. In fact, if we would hear Isaiah’s testimony he would probably say that “After I saw the Lord I was never the same again.” That is the way it is when we see the Lord. If we find ourselves proud or boisterous about our own ideas and opinions then we can know that we have not yet seen the Lord. This is because when we see the Lord, it makes a difference in our life. Or, if we perhaps are growing careless and reckless about life and the issues and decisions of life then we have not yet seen the Lord. Or, if we find ourselves earth bound and materialistic, and caught up in the interests of this world then we have not yet

seen the Lord. *We need a vision of God to enable us to understand clearly what is at stake, understand what is important in life, and what are the serious issues that we need to deal with.* When we see the Lord, we understand that God is our Creator and our Sustainer. However, God is also our Judge — the one we will answer to and the one whom we are accountable to that life is serious. Every decision has eternal implications and great import both for ourselves, our families, and for our churches. We need a vision of God. It gives us a purpose in life. It gives us a vision of the cause that is worth dying for, when we see the Lord. We must have a vision of God. Sad to say, there are many individuals who are simply going on in life, thinking seemingly that this life is all there is. They will perish unless they see the Lord.

2) *We need to have a vision of Calvary.* If we will be saved, we must have a vision of Calvary. We must have an awareness of our great need before God, of our lost condition, of the utter hopelessness of our natural condition, and understand that there is One who offered His life on Calvary, who died so that we might live. This truth, this reality must grip our hearts. I fear sometimes that we take this whole subject of sin and salvation far too lightly. Many of us grow up in the church and we are taught the way to talk, and we are taught the way to believe. Do we really understand how lost we are? Do we really understand how much we need a Saviour? When we see our Saviour and what He accomplished for us, does it draw from us a response of appreciation of love, of commitment, of dedication to Him? It is something that grips us. It is something that changes us. It is something that motivates us. If we do not have that we will perish. The songwriter says (and I think he knew something about a vision of Calvary), “I cried when I saw Calvary. There, God’s only Son was crucified. Standing there I felt unworthy. In the shadow of His cross I knelt and cried.” Has it happened to you? Is the work of Calvary that important to you?

Another hymn that we sing sometimes “Upon that cross of Jesus, Mine eyes at times can see, The very dying form of One, Who suffered there for me. And from my smitten heart with tears, Two wonders I confess, The wonder of His glorious love, And my unworthiness.” We need that personal awareness of Calvary. It must grip and move us to follow and to live a holy life, or else we will perish.

3) *We need the essential vision of the New Testament Church.* Sometimes our view, our vision of the Church gets quite earthly. We see some

deficiencies, failures and some mistakes. Brethren and sisters, if we will be saved, we need to have a vision of God's design for the Church and what God planned for the Church to be and what God expects of the Church today. We need this so that the Church will be not a group of people who have been born in a certain area and part of a certain family. Rather, the Church will be composed of those who are willing to repent of their sin and voluntarily turn their lives over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, surrender their wills, and live, work, and move together with other believers. We need the vision that the Church will be a separated church called out from the world and follow a different voice and leader. It will not follow the customs, fads, and designs of an ungodly society around them. The Church will be a pure and disciplined Church. A standard is lifted up against sin in the church and there is action taken against sin in the church. We need to have a vision of a pure, holy church, a church that is preparing to be the bride of Christ, who is a part of His body today. We need a vision like that. We need a vision of a spiritually alert, alive, and powerful church. This idea of simply going through the motions and mechanically following the patterns that we have always done because we have always done it this way is not enough. It is not God's will for the Church. We need this vision of a church that is spiritually alive and that is filled with the power of the Spirit and that is leaving a clear testimony to the world. We need a vision of the church today that the church is a caring brotherhood, a compassionate, sharing, loving church, that meets our needs and reaches out to help and share. We need a vision for the church like that.

It is this kind of vision (and we could spend a lot of time here) that caused the Anabaptists to come out of the religious circles that they found themselves in. As they read the Scriptures, the heavenly light dawned and this vision gripped their hearts. They were willing to move out and willing to stand up and be counted. They were willing to leave behind friends and family and were willing to pay the price even of their life. My question to you is, "Do you still have that kind of vision for what the church should be and what the church is?" It was this same vision that was alive down through the centuries. It was this vision that motivated individuals in the beginning in the formation of our own group that we enjoy today. Many of us are enjoying blessings and benefits because someone had a vision. Some of us do not know much about the pain, the cost, and the sacrifice that went along with following this light, this gripping burning vision of what the

church should be. We kind of follow along and we enjoy it this way and it has always been this way and it is kind of nice that it is this way but we do not understand why it is this way. It is because individuals had vision.

Do you have a vision for the church today, or are you riding along for the benefits? We must have a vision. Sad to say, when this vision is lost, many souls are lost. We notice in some of the older brethren (it is not necessarily older brethren, but you notice it especially in them) that there is a gleam in their eye and they raise a concern. They say, "I am concerned about this because I saw this happen before. I see where this leads. We experienced this before." We know it is real in their hearts. It is the vision that they have that causes them to raise a concern. We all need to have that kind of vision. Our text is true. Mark it down; someone will perish unless we have that vision. You may say, "It does not seem that serious to me. I can kind of fit in here and I ride along." However, it does not work that way. We must have a vision. If we begin to give into carnality, casualness, worldliness, and materialism the Church will eventually lose her reason for being. Why have a church if it is like everyone else? We must have a vision for the New Testament Church. We must allow that vision to move and motivate us to do what is right today.

4) *Another part of this essential vision which is simply an extension of what I have already been talking about is a vision for godly homes.* God, in His love and mercy, designed homes to be for the blessing and benefit of mankind. Godly homes do not happen automatically. It takes individuals with vision, ideals, and an understanding of what God requires and what God expects. God calls mothers and fathers to take their place and stand as a testimony of grace and as an example to those who would look up to them of what spiritual minded Christians ought to be. God has planned that individuals like that would live and blend together in an atmosphere of love and harmony and submission. However, it does not always happen that way. Children are growing up in homes (in homes among us perhaps) that are not experiencing the benefits of that kind of home life. I wonder sometimes, have we lost a vision of godly, Christian homes? A vision of the home where there is discipline, obedience, orderliness, love, acceptance, and security. If that is lost, souls will be lost. We struggle. We pray, and we counsel children and young people who struggle with an understanding of God because of fathers and mothers perhaps who are not what they ought to be.

Many are lost and we lose a vision for a godly home. We must understand how each home affects the church. Every home has an impact and an effect on the direction of the church today. The level of discipline, the measure of spiritual interest, the level of church support, the atmosphere of love and security found in the home, all affect the church positively or negatively. I appeal to you, especially parents who have been down the road a way. We have some disappointments along the way and we have had some rough spots, difficulties and special challenges. You can sometimes get to the place where, we must have to go with the flow and hope it works out okay. That is not enough brethren and sisters. That is giving up the vision. I ask you "Are your ideals still intact?" We know we do not always meet our goals, but the ideals must still be there. You must still keep striving. You must keep working at it. You must keep labouring on; doing what we know is right in spite of failures in the past and so on. We must have a vision for godly homes. This vision must motivate and move us. The vision includes the awareness of how much and how many will be lost if we fail. We say this many times. We are a link in the chain. We benefit from the faithfulness of those in the past. Nevertheless, if we fail today, how many souls will be lost yet in the future? We do not know that. We get a glimpse once in a while when we go to a funeral, let us say, of one who lived many years. We look at the offspring and we are amazed and impressed with how many people follow and how many people are affected by one individual. We need to say sometimes, "If only they would have remained faithful, what a difference it could have made." Other times we can thank God for a vision that was passed on.

5) *Part of this vision is also a vision for evangelism and a vision for souls.* Jesus said in John 4:35, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. Truly it is. We live amidst an ocean of humanity. There are souls we meet day after day. We live and work by them. We do business with them. We meet them in the store and on the highway. Many of them are perishing and going to a Christless grave. Unless someone will reach out, have a vision, will testify of the grace of God and point them to Calvary those souls will be lost for eternity. Does it matter? Does it mean anything to you? Do you have a vision for souls? This vision is not only for those out there. There are individuals who are right among us who are struggling or discouraged, who may be giving up at this very time. Do you know about them? Are you praying for them?

Have you gone to them? Have you laid your hand on their shoulder and said, “I am praying for you. I want to help you what can I do? I am ready to listen.”

We must have a vision for souls.

6) *We must also have a vision of eternity — that this life is only a short proving ground for eternity.* I suppose this overshadows all the others, I was speaking of a few years here and then we begin our long existence [Ecclesiastes 12:5]. We must, as individuals who know the Word of God, have a vision of a place where individuals will go who have rejected Christ, who have lived in self-will, in sinfulness, and in worldliness and where they will go to the place of eternal damnation forever. I think sometimes perhaps we do not have enough teaching such that the reality of hell does not grip us as it should, otherwise, we would do something about it, we would live differently ourselves, or we would have more of a compassion for those who are headed for hell. Somehow we should pray that the Lord would give us a little bit of a vision of what it means to be lost forever. I was told one time that Brother Irvin S. used to say that we need to preach hell to the Christian and preach heaven to the sinner. That sounds a little bit backwards maybe at first thought, but I believe there is something to that. If we really have a vision of hell, it will make a difference in our lives.

*We need to also have a vision of that place that is prepared for the faithful.* There is the reward of faithfulness, the reward of living for the Lord, the reward of rejecting the world and self-life and all of that. That place is prepared for the faithful. We must have a vision of heaven. It is what keeps us going. We know that there is a reward at the end. The anticipation of living in the presence of our Lord. We need that glowing and burning desire to finally reach our heavenly home that we need. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:20, 21 that our citizenship, or “our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ: (21) Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” The apostle John said in 1 John 3:3 that “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

A vision like that does something for us. It motivates us to live holy lives before God today. May God help us to have the vision that will save us, our homes, and our congregations lest we would find ourselves groping

and walking blindly in darkness and finally perishing ourselves. May God give us that kind of vision.

*Bro. Daryl Bair.*

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## **SNAPSHOTS.**

Brief excerpts from Anabaptist publications.

*From: RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE SCRIPTURES by George R Brunk*

*Publisher: Sword and Trumpet, Harrisonburg, VA.*

## **The New Law**

The widespread theory that the teachings of Christ are law and therefore do not belong to the Gospel of grace, is purely a human invention, and robs those who accept it of the proper acceptance and use of the teachings of Christ, who is the new Lawgiver as well as the Foundation, and Author and Finisher of our faith—the great salvation "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord." (Heb. 2:3.) "The law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17.)

"The law and the prophets were until John, since that time the kingdom of God (grace) is preached." (Luke 16:16.)

Here is clearly shown that John's ministry is the line between the two covenants; and the work and teachings of Christ constitute the founding of the Church and the preparing of His will before His death. (Heb. 9:15-17.) There was a tendency in the early Church to do away with the new law of Christ in favor of a faith-only standard, upon which James the Lord's brother put a decided check, so that they who now want to be rid of the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's commandments are also ready to relegate James to the scrap-heap of a graceless legality.

In 1 Timothy 6:3-5 Paul comes strongly to the rescue with words that all disciples should engrave upon their hearts. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even THE WORDS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND TO THE DOCTRINE WHICH IS ACCORDING TO GODLINESS, he is proud, knowing nothing—but doting about questions and strife of words whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, PERVERSE DISPUTINGS OF MEN OF CORRUPT MINDS, and destitute of truth, supposing that gain is godliness: FROM SUCH WITHDRAW THYSELF."

We are to withdraw ourselves from such teachers as declare that the wholesome words, sayings, and commandments of Christ are not authoritative to the Church.

### **The Relation of Law and Grace**

The religious world is filled with the false notion that no law can be consistent with grace; that if we are under any law we are devoid of grace, and if we are in grace, we are free from all law obligation.

This is exactly true of the law of Moses, or first covenant, as a whole, for it required perfection and provided no atonement, no mercy, and consequently no grace.

Jesus was the only one that could keep that law and He needed no redeeming grace but was justified by the Law of Moses.

Jesus being perfect could be justified by the perfect law of God, but mankind being imperfect were all condemned by the law and under the curse. (Gal. 3:10.)

Through Christ a Gospel of grace was given to the world, as foretold in Isaiah 55—see in verse one how free the Gospel is to be; and in verse three how it carries sure mercies; in verse five it includes the Gentiles; in verses six and seven it gives the conditions and in verses twelve and thirteen it shows the happy result; joy and peace, and a changed life are the everlasting sign! This however is not all; note carefully in verses six and seven that it is conditional grace, and in verse four note that this Savior is not only a Witness and a Leader of His people, but a Commander!

Grace, mercy, peace, guidance, commandments. It is a false and destructive message which cuts the commandments out of the Gospel of Christ.

While it is fully true that the disciple of the Lord is not under the Mosaic law of salvation by human merit, it is equally true that no true disciple of Christ is free from the NEW LAW OF CONDITIONAL GRACE.

"The law was given by Moses—"; "We are not under the law" (John 1:17, Rom. 6:15). "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," "Under the law to Christ." (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2.)

Here is the balanced truth, we are not under the old law of salvation by human merit but we are under the new law of Conditional Grace!

Jeremiah foretells this new covenant in chapter 31:31-32, and in Hebrews 8 the Apostle Paul applies this to the New Testament or Gospel of Christ. In Hebrews 7:12 the apostle shows that there must be a new law as well as a new priest.

Jeremiah said that the new covenant would not accord with the old covenant and Paul said that as the priesthood was changed from the Aaronic to that of Melchisedek that there must also be a change in the law. (Heb. 7:12.)

Jesus was this new priest and He was the new lawgiver and all this was fulfilled when He gave the new law in the Sermon on the Mount and in His teachings as recorded in the Gospels.

Note in the Sermon on the Mount how He definitely sets forth the vital differences between His new law and the old; over and over He says that it was said by them of old time so and so, but I say unto you differently! "not according" (Jer. 31:31).

As the Ten Commandments were the heart of the Old covenant, so the Sermon on the Mount is the heart of the New covenant: it is the great constitution of the Church of which the epistolary truths and teachings are transcripts, deductions, and declarations. If we wish to inherit we must keep the terms of the last Will and Testament.

*George R Brunk.*

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## **THE NEED OF VISION**

*By: G.Koehn.*

As used in this article, vision indicates spiritual perception and comprehension. Fostered by the Holy Ghost, it is a grace that sees the glory and blessing of things not seen with the eye (1 Cor. 2:9). It perceives the doors that will open and the purposes of God in relation to the gospel program of the New Testament church. With a certain enthusiasm and zeal for the kingdom, a person with vision embraces the truth revealed through the Word.

The above description is that of a prophet. In the broad sense, a prophet is a godly person who senses and makes known the will of God. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon the seventy men chosen to help Moses, the Lawgiver made a prophetic exclamation: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29)! That came to pass in the New Testament of the blood of Christ. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel

2:28-29).

As in the Old Testament, though, there are many false prophets today. The distinction between a true and false prophet is whether his vision is a true or false vision.

The Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, is the optical nerve of spiritual vision. Jesus said the Spirit would "guide you into all truth ... and He will shew you things to come" (John 16:13). The unique vision of the children of Issachar in the early days of David's reign is noteworthy. They "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (I Chron. 12:32). Vision entails commitment, conviction, and consecration.

Spiritual vision is not intellectually "seeing around the corner" or "over the horizon." It begins with faith in God, or believing what God says in the Word. It is the peculiar blessing of those who are circumcised "in the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:29). Hebrews 11 describes men and women of vision, saying: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (v. 13). Spiritual vision beholds things "beyond the shadows of these lowlands."

Those people not only had vision, but they had a vision. "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:15-16). Abraham had a vision of a better place, and he "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

The tragedy of not having vision, or a vision, is spelled out in the timeless quote from Proverbs. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). Unless one has a vision of his real purpose in life, he will merely be a professor and not a true Christian. Likewise, church members who are not zealous for the faith will relate to the church with little concern and earnestness. Without vision people are adrift, carried by the prevailing winds of the times.

In the secular realm it can be said that the founding fathers of the United States had a vision of a nation of liberty and freedom. They drafted a constitution that reflected what was, in their day, a radical proposition. A sense of dependence on God, and the restraint that God-consciousness applies to

a people, was integral in their vision. The Almighty blessed that vision, and North America has sheltered the people of God as a result. For this we give thanks to the God of heaven.

That original vision is being lost, slowly but surely. Powerful humanistic elements in society have divorced liberty and freedom from God-consciousness. They also have a vision, and their swelling pronouncements extol the intellect of man and not the wisdom of God. But their vision is not according to the eternal Word of God. One has reason to ponder what the consequences of this false vision will be. Permissiveness and self-indulgence, the idea that whatever makes one feel good is okay, do not make for a stable society.

Many readers of the Messenger will have had ancestors that came to America from Europe in the 1800s. They left beautiful lands behind because they had a vision, not of economic prosperity but of their salvation and that of their children. However, many of them were destitute spiritually as well as materially.

Our forefathers' vision was not tunnel vision, focused solely on the church. Their vision was born in their hearts upon true repentance toward God and faith in Christ Jesus. They were converted in the true sense of the word. Following, the doctrine of the Word became precious and real to them. Some of them had known only a "form of godliness," not experiencing the inward communion with God. Now, in their enthusiasm and vision, they understood that the keeping of the doctrine was the defining identification of the church of God. This vision gave them true liberty and freedom. Their spiritual fervency was contagious, which brought many more unto salvation.

The foundational principles of the New Testament church are clearly spelled out in the Word. True repentance of sin and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus as one's only hope is first. Then follows discipleship, which entails cross-bearing, being defenseless like Christ was and taught, not being conformed to the world, and having a burden for spreading the gospel. Unless we have a vision, these defining principles of true Christianity will eventually be vague and quite meaningless.

A vision of the New Testament-mandated purity of the true church is needed to keep the doctrine(s) of the Word. Historically, Mennonite constituencies have believed in church discipline for this end. However, a confession of faith and true spiritual vision is not one and the same. One is re-

corded on paper, and the other is written in the heart. Diminished vision regarding the pure, true church of God undermines conviction for discipline. To lovingly, yet firmly, discipline for a lack of spirituality, worldliness, breaches of fellowship, and materialism (which actually are all fruits of a carnal heart) requires vision to prove the spirits. Only true vision will provide the courage and light to do so.

"Lord, give us a vision."

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### *THE REFINER'S FIRE*

The Refiner's fire is hot and slow—  
 At least to our finite minds.  
 The white heat burns the dross away;  
 It leaves no dross behind.

The Master's touch—so gentle, kind  
 A touch—soothes my trembling soul.  
 The imperfections, to which I'm blind,  
 He takes, making me whole.

My hand in His, my flesh is weak,  
 My heart aches with trials sore.  
 My soul is in the Refiner's fire;  
 He'll purge it yet once more.

He sees my anger, fear, and pain;  
 He cares, He cares! He knows.  
 He sends His comfort, like gentle rain;  
 He understands my woes.

When I am tried, I shall come forth  
 With heart and soul pure gold.  
 The Master's fire has burned the dross—  
 His beauty to behold.

*Kari Holderman.*

## **"The Earth Is Full of the Goodness of the LORD"**

"He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (Psalm 33:5). The word goodness as used in this verse testifies of the loving kindness and unfailing love of the Lord. Goodness and kindness carry the thought of showing love, of helping, and of doing good deeds to another.

The goodness of the Lord is evident in Creation. The psalmist continues his praise in verse 6, saying, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." When God completed the work of Creation, He pronounced it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Creation itself displays that goodness. God placed the sun the right distance from the earth to support life. The climate is neither too cold nor too hot, and the oxygen needed to sustain life is provided. After God created the earth, the trees, and the animals, He created man in His own image.

The goodness of the Lord is evident in His dealings with man in Creation and the Fall. Because God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, He showed His goodness by creating Eve as a help meet for Adam. When man sinned, God moved to restore communication with him and make it possible for man to again worship Him acceptably. He promised that He would send a Savior through whom all men could be reconciled to God. This promise was fulfilled about four thousand years later.

The goodness of the Lord is evident in the experiences Israel faced in Egypt and in the wilderness. When they were oppressed by the Egyptians, God saw their suffering and delivered them. He led them out of Egypt into the land of Canaan by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. At the Red Sea they thought they were trapped by Pharaoh's hosts and saw no way of escape. God told Moses to stretch out his hand, and a way of escape was provided as the waters parted (Psalm 33:7).

When Israel did not have food and water in the wilderness, God heard their cry and supplied their needs.

The goodness of the Lord is evident in His love of righteousness and judgment (Psalm 33:5). God's righteousness is evident in His dealings with man. He has established authorities to restrain evil in the earth. Civil government has been established to mete out justice. The rulers of the nations are appointed by God to restrain evil and to bring evil nations to justice.

The goodness of God is especially evident in the New Testament era. Jesus came to earth and gave His life to redeem all who come to Him. God has shown His goodness to His people by establishing a separate kingdom of the redeemed, a kingdom of righteousness. We are blessed to be part of this visible New Testament kingdom of Christ, frequently referred to by the Anabaptists as "the perfection of Christ." The church's responsibility is to show forth God's righteousness to all people, inviting them to join the kingdom of Christ.

The goodness of the Lord is evident to our generation. "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:11). By the goodness of God, His Word has been preserved down through the ages even to our generation. In the Bible we find God's wisdom, counsel, and promises to all generations. The answers are provided to questions concerning the beginning of the world, man's purpose in life, and the future of the believer. The Bible reveals the beginning of the world through the Creation account. Through the message of salvation, it provides purpose in life. Finally, it reveals that the believer has a glorious future with God in heaven.

The goodness of the Lord is evident in our daily lives. It is by His goodness that we can breathe and move. The Lord blesses us with the strength to work to provide for our needs. In times that we cannot provide for ourselves, the Lord provides for us through our brethren. It is the Lord that works in our hearts and convicts us when we fail. The power of the Lord helps us to be victorious over temptation and gives us the wisdom to discern His will for man.

God's eye will be over them that fear Him and hope in His mercy (Psalm 33:18).

What should be our response to the goodness of the Lord? We should recognize that "it is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22). We should also recognize that we are not worthy of the goodness and mercy that God has shown to us.

As we consider all that the Lord has done, we should respond in humble obedience, praise, and adoration. Our lives should show forth the righteousness of God to all we meet. Our love for the Lord and all He has done should cause us to reach out to others, giving to those that are in need. It should move us to share God's love and mercy to those about us by speak-

ing to them about the Lord and inviting them to join with us in His service.

*Bro. Curvin Huber Lebanon, PA.*

**Lord of Heaven and Earth and Sea.**

To Thee all praise and glory be!  
How shall we show our love to Thee,  
Who givest all?

For peaceful homes, and healthful days,  
For all the blessings earth displays,  
We owe Thee thankfulness and praise,  
Who givest all.

Thou didst not spare Thine only Son,  
But gav'st Him for a world undone,  
And freely with that blessed One  
Thou givest all.

To Thee, from whom we all derive  
Our life, our gifts, our pow'r to give;  
O may we ever with Thee live,  
Who givest all!

*Christopher Wordsworth.*

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## When Vision Fails

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he (Proverbs 29:18).

Please read the following scriptures to gain an insight into the life of Samson. Judges 13:2-5, 13: 24-25; 16:6, 16:15-20 and 16: 28-30.

As a judge of the Israelites, Samson was unique. All the other judges of Israel were leaders of groups of men. In all the wars fought during Samson's time as a judge, he acted alone. We do not understand why God used methods such as Samson marrying a Philistine woman to gain an inroad with the Philistines. It appears God had a long-term program in mind. In spite of Samson's ungodly involvements, he is listed with the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Is it possible that today God allows some unpleasant events to occur that in the long term view will have proved to be a benefit?

The children of Israel had a long history of backsliding from the walk with God that they had been taught by Moses and later by Joshua. It appeared that as long as there were leaders who could remember Joshua, they were able to keep the people in obedience to God. However, as the generations came and went, the people had a tendency to turn more and more to the gods of the surrounding nations. God, in His mercy, came to their rescue by providing a judge to save the people from further oppression. This was the case with Samson.

The children of Israel were under the domination of the Philistines, who were a wicked people. These people engaged in immoral and degrading practices, which the Israelites tended to accept far too readily. It was in this setting that God announced to Manoah and his wife that a special child would be born to them. This child was to be a Nazarite from before birth. This meant that the mother could not drink any strong drink before the baby was born. Furthermore, a razor should never touch the hair of his head. This was a solemn vow that should not be broken.

Nothing is told us of Samson's youth. In the course of time he desired to marry, and a young woman from the Philistines attracted his attention. Samson's parents tried to persuade him to marry - someone from their own

people, but to no avail. They did not realize that God was using this as a means to provoke the Philistines. Through treachery and deceit, the Philistines were able to answer the riddle Samson had given them. Samson was so provoked he set fire to their crops and destroyed them.

As time went on it seemed that one occasion after another arose through which the Philistines were greatly distressed with Samson. Even the Israelites grew weary of Samson's frequent forays into enemy territory. Not appreciating his escapades, they bound Samson to be delivered into the hands of the Philistines. After this betrayal by his own countrymen, Samson slew a thousand of the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. The Spirit of the Lord had settled upon him, enabling him to make this great slaughter.

Samson's lust for women continually brought him into trouble with the enemy. Why he was attracted to the Philistine women may be a mystery, but it may have been God's way to subdue the Philistine nation. Samson's greatest test came with his love for Delilah. She was more than a match for him. This ungodly relationship proved to be his undoing, and finally, weary of her continual nagging, he revealed the secret of his strength. Samson paid dearly for breaking his vow with God. The Philistines conquered their enemy, and they put out his eyes.

God was not done with Samson even though he was bound to a grinding machine in prison. After some time Samson's strength returned as his hair grew back. The Philistines gathered to celebrate their victory and called for Samson to be brought. It was in this setting that Samson, by pulling down the two pillars in the Philistine temple, was avenged the loss of his eyes. In his death Samson slew more of his enemies than he did in his life.

Commentators believe that Samson's life overlapped with Eli the priest. Though Samson did much to break the Philistine yoke, he did not conquer them. These people continued to be a problem to the Israelites.

### Practical Truths for Today

When our natural vision fails, we are quick to seek corrective measures. Blindness is a major handicap, and we do all we can to prevent it. Most of our normal activities require the ability to see. The better our vision the more effectively we can function. Corrective measures for failing eyesight often are as simple as getting prescription glasses. However, sometimes loss of vision is progressive and irreversible.

When our spiritual vision begins to fail, do we quickly apply corrective

measures, or are we, like Samson, indifferent to the dangers that can take us down the road to blindness? In order to keep our spiritual vision clear and focused we will need to do what we can to protect it. We will sometimes need to be able and willing to look at matters through other people's eyes. Our perspective may be distorted by our self-serving tendencies.

When we look at Samson's lifestyle, there is not much to recommend him as an example to us. We find his carnal behavior offensive. Samson was aware of the vow that his parents made before his birth and of their spiritual concern for him. His actions seem especially appalling to us because of his disregard for his Nazarite vow and his parents' concern.

The warmongering Philistines had been a thorn in Israel's side ever since they first started to settle the land of Canaan after the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Samson was not alone in his disdain for the commandments of God as delivered to the children of Israel through Moses, Aaron, and Joshua. Throughout their history the Israelites had had periods of backsliding when the pressures of the surrounding nations influenced them to rebel against God and the leadership He provided. Samson's actions were altogether too typical of his fellow Israelites, and, must we say, of carnal Christians?

It would be difficult for us to identify a particular time in Samson's life when we could say that he had clear vision. Still, God had a work for him to do, and during his lifetime he did much for Israel in keeping their traditional enemies, the Philistines, at bay. Could it be that if Samson had been more faithful to the original vows that dedicated him to God that he could have done more to conquer the enemy rather than merely harass them?

Samson was interested in material things. He reached out for things that would give him pleasure. He seemed to get satisfaction from troubling the Philistines. When Christians lose vision they are no different, as they seek satisfaction from material things.

People like to be accepted by their peers. This is not abnormal, but when acceptance by peers rather than acceptance by God becomes important, it is clear that vision has failed. Evidence that this has happened can be seen when church sanctioned activities and programs become secondary to social functions that cater to the flesh. Everybody has an important contribution to make to the church and to the world. There are many opportunities to practice friendliness and consideration to our fellowmen. These opportunities should not be restricted to a small peer group.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Vision suggests looking ahead. When vision fails, people become selfish and seek honour for themselves. This can happen in the pursuit of material gain and social acceptance. Keeping our vision focused on Christ brings blessings and true happiness.

The people of God, together with the rest of society, experience times of spiritual testing and economic hardships. This is a time of testing for all of us. Do we have the vision that God will see us through if we are willing to live according to His word and within our means?

Points to Ponder.

1. Are there degrees of vision?
2. Paul stated, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). How do we apply this to ourselves?
3. Consider how faithfulness in our everyday walk of life is one of the better means to maintain vision from God.
4. Sincere and dedicated people generally share a common vision. Why is this true?

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## Divine Support

**Thou art the blessed God, happy in Thyself, source of happiness in Thy creatures, my maker, benefactor, proprietor, upholder. Thou hast produced and sustained me, supported and indulged me, saved and kept me; Thou art in every situation able to meet my needs and miseries.**

**May I live by Thee, live for Thee, never be satisfied with my Christian progress but as I resemble Christ; and may conformity to His principles, temper, and conduct grow hourly in my life. Let Thy unexampled love constrain me into holy obedience, and render my duty my delight. If others deem my faith folly, my meekness infirmity, my zeal madness, my hope delusion, my actions hypocrisy, may I rejoice to suffer for Thy name.**

**Keep me walking steadfastly towards the country of everlasting delights, that paradise-land which is my true inheritance. Support me by the strength of heaven that I may never turn back, or desire false pleasures that will disappear into nothing. As I pursue my heavenly journey by Thy grace let me be known as a man with no aim but that of a burning desire for Thee, and the good and salvation of my fellow men.**

*From: Puritan Prayers.*



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