



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Where There is No Vision, the People Perish — Proverbs 29:18

When we look at the life of Esau, we see the earmarks of an earthly mind and a profane man. May we not be profane and strive to be spiritually minded and not fall into the same trap that Esau fell into, living for only the here and now and the present benefits that he could receive and not having vision of the long range effects of his choices.

That is what I would like to

look at for a message, the title is taken from a verse in Proverbs 29:18, a familiar verse, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” I would like to look at the first part of that verse, not necessarily spending much time with this as a text but thinking about the vision that we, as the people of God, need to have. “Where there is no vision, the

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people perish.” There is no hope if we have no vision.

What are we talking about when we talk about a vision? The word that is used here in the Hebrew comes from a root that means, “to gaze at,” or, “to mentally perceive,” or “to contemplate,” carries to the idea of a revelation. As we use the word “vision,” there are various definitions. Webster would give various definitions. Sometimes we think of a vision as “a dream, a

trance,” or something like that where a person would receive a supernatural revelation of some kind. We are not necessarily thinking about that kind of vision, although possibly there are some similarities.

We are thinking about spiritual perception. The definition from Webster that would coincide with our thoughts says, “a mode of seeing or conceiving, unusual discernment or foresight.” I would add to that, we are think-

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ing about spiritual discernment and foresight. Spiritual insight is not simply carnal ingenuity or the ability to have discernment or foresight but it is guided by the Spirit of God. I would like to note that in opening from Acts 2:16–18. Peter quoted from the prophet Joel, referring to the Church age when the Holy Spirit would be poured out. “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; (17) And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: (18) And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.” This may refer some also to the dream type of vision, especially in the apostolic days of the Early Church where God sometimes used that to give special revelations to His people.

We do not necessarily look for that or expect that today. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit working through our lives needs to give us a spiritual vision, spiritual insight, foresight, and understanding to perceive the far-reaching effects and the outcome of the decisions that we are making today, exactly what we notice

Esau was lacking in his experience. We note here that in order to have this spiritual vision and foresight, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. There must be that outpouring of the Holy Spirit which we all have the privilege of experiencing, and tapping into that power. As Christians, if we have been born again, we can have access to that infilling of the Holy Spirit and through that we can be given (in a sense) an unusual discernment or foresight. It is unusual in the sense that the natural man, the carnal man, does not have it. He cannot see things from a spiritual vantage point, as the child of God can. He is filled with the Spirit.

I would like to look a little bit at the vision of Isaiah and make some parallels to the spiritual vision that we need to have today. Isaiah’s vision here of course was in relation to Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah 1:1, 2 says, “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (2) Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” This is a message of warning and judgment that God was bringing

to His people through Isaiah because they had erred. They had turned away and lost the vision. Isaiah had a vision for the people of God and he was warning them to turn back to God. We are not implying that we, or our church is in that state and that we need warning because we have rebelled and turned away from God. Rather, we want to take lessons from them. The New Testament says, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition” (1 Corinthians 10:11). We want to be admonished as we look at their failure to have a vision, and from the vision of a godly man, renew and keep our vision so that we do not fall into the same traps and condemnation that they fell into.

I would like to pick out a few points from Isaiah’s vision here in chapter 1 first of all and then perhaps a few other places later on. Verse 9 says, “Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” 1) *First of all, we need to have a vision of God’s gracious deliverance, of what God has spared and delivered us from.* We owe the Lord all honour and praise. We need to stop

and consider the awful condemnation from which He has redeemed us. We need to consider what would have been our fate and our condemnation had the Lord not spared us, like it says here. We would have had the same condemnation as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and come under the same judgment. We can say the same of thing of our lives. It is only because of what the Lord has done for us that we have been spared. We need to, from time to time, simply ponder what great salvation is ours through Jesus Christ, and what our condition would be outside of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 says. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Notice the condition of the unregenerate, natural man outside of God. This is a description of us. We would fall under that category where it

says, “And such were some of you,” but we are washed. We are delivered from that. We are sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. Therefore, all praise be to God who has delivered us from so great a condemnation.

Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” We need to give all credit to the grace of God. This is mentioned in some of the songs that we sing. We have no merits to claim of our own as the people of God. We need to testify with the apostle Paul that it is only by the grace of God that we are what we are, and that we are where we are today. We have nothing to boast of on our own. It is not because of our personal ingenuity or any merits for our goodness that we have been saved and that God has brought us to where we are.

Also, Ephesians 2:8, 9 speaks of the grace of God, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.” It is not through our works, but simply by the grace of God that we

are what we are and that we are saved.

2) *We also need to have a vision of our true standing before God.* What really is our condition before God almighty? We need to consider what we were by nature (our lost condition) and all that God has done for us, the great salvation that He has wrought for us. Now, where are we today? What is our standing before God? Let us notice the condition that God saw His people in this account from Isaiah 1:10–15. Is there hypocrisy in our lives? What God saw here when He looked at His people was a people full of hypocrisy. There was a form of religion and of worship and a profession of piety and yet there was sin lurking there in their lives. All of their ritual and all of their form of religion and worship were valueless because they had not been washed. They had not experienced the regeneration of heart. All of this became an abomination to God. It was vain and empty. To what purpose is it all? In verse 11, God said, “I am full [of it].”

How is it in our experience today? We do not expect to be involved in idolatry in the same way to the extent that the children of Israel became involved, but is there any hypocrisy in our

lives? Do we have only an outward form of religion and worship? Sure, we go to church and we say that we are Christians, and we try to abide by the church standards (at least as far as people can see). However, is there something hidden behind the scenes in our experience? Is there something of sin or of worldliness lurking in our lives that we are not ready to crucify, that we are not ready to lay down?

If that is the case, all of our form, and outward profession are valueless. We do not want to take away from the value of orderly separated church life, attending church and the forms of worship, traditional forms of worship that we appreciate. We do not want to detract from the value of that at all. There is value in that, but it must spring from a regenerated heart. It is not an end in itself. Therefore, if we have not been completely washed and experienced the regeneration and sanctification, and that is “number one,” our form of religion will not save us.

God raised the question in verse 12, “Who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?” We could ask the same question. If our heart is not really with the church, if we are trying to retain some worldliness to

gratify our carnal desires, we can ask ourselves the same questions. “Who hath required us to live like we do? Who has required us to be members of this church?” We have not been forced to take up this way of life, or to be members of this church or to follow these church standards. It needs to be, and it is a voluntary choice. We do it for a love for God. It needs to spring from a spiritual vision and a heart that has been regenerated. Therefore, if there is any hypocrisy in our lives, God would ask us, “Who is requiring you? Why do you even need a form of religion and piety if your heart is not truly sanctified?”

We notice the seriousness of the condition that people found themselves in here, and the seriousness of hypocrisy. In verse 15 God said, “I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.” God turns away from those who are hiding things in their life. If there is hypocrisy in our lives it is a very dangerous place to be in. God will not even hear our prayers from us. We cannot claim the blessings of God, even as Esau when he made the wrong decisions and still hoped to receive the blessings. He was mistaken. The blessings of God will not be on a life that has some hypocrisy, or some hidden sin.

Hopefully, we have been washed like verses 16 and 17 speak of. “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; (17) Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” Have we been washed from iniquity? Have we put it away completely? Have we put righteousness in its place and put that washing and regeneration into practical expression like verse 17 shows. After we have been washed and put away the evil doings and replaced it with holiness and righteousness and learned to do well, do we put it into practical expression? God can bless that practical expression. It is a holiness coming from a holy and sanctified heart. God’s approval and blessing is upon that.

Going on to verse 18 and 19, thinking still about our standing before God, our relationship with God, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (19) If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.” They however, rebelled in verse 20, “But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword:

for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.” Are we communicating with God? God calls us. Are we accepting His terms for being cleansed and receiving His blessing? It is only upon His terms that we can come and receive the blessing. We cannot come on our own terms. We cannot through our religious form merit any of God’s blessings as we noted. Rather as we accept His terms we can come and be cleansed, and receive His blessing.

What are God’s terms? In verse 19 it is willing obedience. “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.” What is our standing with God? What is our situation? We need to have a spiritual vision, a spiritual understanding, and insight of that. Then, we will be able to receive the Lord’s blessing. If we are in a right relationship, “ye shall eat the good of the land.” What is that in our experience? We can apply it to the blessings of the Christian life, rejoicing in a victorious Christian experience and living in peace and harmony with the brotherhood — with the church. We can support the regulations and the standards of the church and work in harmony with the brotherhood. It is all a part of the blessings — eating the good of the land when we are at one with God. We can have joy

in service for the King. Our sins can be washed away and made white as the snow. We can certainly appreciate that thought with all of the snow that we can have in winter. All our sins. When we thought of the beginning of our condition before God, naturally, our carnal tendencies, outside of God what we would have been, God is ready to take us and remake us. He will wash us clean. Though our sins were as scarlet, He will make them white as snow. He will make us pure, holy, and useful for Him. Let us ponder our standing before our maker.

3) *We also need a vision of our future standing with God, not only what our standing is now, but what it will be in the future.* If our standing, and our condition is right now, we can have the assurance of salvation and the assurance that we will in the end arrive at the right place. However, the test is on, all through life. We have not gained. We have not won the crown until the end of this life, till we have been victorious throughout life.

I would like to read Isaiah 1:25–27 and notice God’s desire for His people in the future to the culmination of our relationship with God. “And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all

thy tin: (26) And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. (27) Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.”

God desires to totally purge away our dross and make us forever a faithful city for Him. Is that our vision and desire? In this life, we will always have the old human nature trying to pull us down. I am not exactly sure what all he is referring to here by purging “away all thy dross.” Nevertheless, in a sense we can be, and we are sanctified. We must be living a holy life in this life, in the Christian life, but our bodies are not redeemed until after this life, until the dead are resurrected, or we as Christians are taken to glory and receive our new bodies. Only then will our redemption, our sanctification be complete. That is God’s desire for us. May that ever be our vision and our goal as well — to be faithful in this life until our redemption is complete and God has completely purged away all the dross, so that we can be a part of God’s holy people, “the faithful city.”

It made me think of Luke 18:8 where Jesus said, “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" When Jesus returns how will He find us? Will He find faith at our congregation? Will He find us being faithful? Will we be able to be numbered among the faithful holy city? Revelation 22:11 gives us the conclusion of the matter at the end of life. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." At the end of life, the way we have lived, our condition, our present standing before God will determine our destiny. It will remain the same as we have lived, if we have lived a just and holy righteous life we will be granted the privilege of continuing holy, even a holier, more righteous life throughout eternity. However, if hypocrisy is found in our lives, if there is unjustness or filthiness then the other destiny will be ours, and it will remain that way throughout eternity.

Judgment is coming in Isaiah 1:27, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." The time of judgment is coming. What will be our judgment? Will it be a judgment unto condemnation or

judgment unto redemption? We will all be judged. The righteous will be judged. May we be among those who will be judged at the throne of Christ. "The judgment seat of Christ," (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10) then declared righteous, pure and holy and experience the judgment of redemption, rather than the judgment of condemnation.

I would like to consider a bit more a practical aspect of our vision. I would like to look at three phases or three areas that our vision must touch 1) our personal lives. 2) Our family — our vision for our family. 3) A vision for our church. 1) *Personal vision — a vision for our own personal experience with God.* I thought of a few examples in Scripture who definitely had a vision that we can learn from and pattern after. Ruth was one of those. She had a vision for her life and experience with God. In Ruth 1:16, 17 "Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: (17) Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." We

know the account here. Ruth was from a heathen nation. She was a Moabitess, from a heathen country. She wanted to return with her mother-in-law to Israel, to the people of God and she was determined to spend the rest of her life with the people of God. She had a vision of the future implications of her decisions. She was determined in her heart that she would live with the people of God.

Her vision was one that would carry her through life. It was till the end of life. She was going to be with the people of God until her death. Do we have that same vision? Are we that dedicated to the people of God that we would not want to be anywhere else, and the people of God will be our people, God will be our God until death? We will remain here until the day of our death. Are we that dedicated to the cause of Christ and the Church?

Also, the apostle Paul was a man of vision. In Romans 8:38, 39, Paul expresses his vision and how it affected his life, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul

was persuaded and determined in his own mind. He had vision of what he must follow and how he must live to win the crown. He was determined that nothing would come into his experience to separate him from the love of Christ. Can we testify the same thing today? Do we have that determination? Even to the point of death? Or whatever it may be? Paul was persuaded, be it spiritual powers, angels, principalities, or height or depth or any other creature, death, persecution. Are we persuaded that we will be faithful no matter what the cost is, we will be faithful to the end? We need that kind of personal vision for our own experience. Our commitment to God must be strong.

Also, in Philippians 3:13, 14, the apostle Paul testifies of his vision. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, (14) I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." We need to leave behind what is behind. Yes, like we mentioned, we need to realize what we have been delivered from and give God the glory and honour for that. Then, we need to go on in our Christian

experience and not be entangled in things of the past, or lose our salvation, zeal, and our assurance of salvation or our zeal in the Christian life because of things that may have taken place in the past. It is not through ourselves. We do not count ourselves to have apprehended but we are pressing forward, reaching toward the goal. We need to have that perspective and vision. We forget what is behind and reach “forth unto those things which are before . . . press[ing] toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” May we continue to press forward and have that vision and determination in our personal Christian lives. Keep pressing forward toward the prize, toward the reward, the reward of eternal life.

To maintain our personal vision, the vision for our personal Christian experience, it requires a personal communion with God. A daily communion in our personal devotional life. We need to keep that alive to keep our vision alive.

2) *We should have a vision for our family and our vision must go beyond only our own personal experience.* We are responsible for the families that God has given us as well. We need to have a vision for where they will

spend eternity. What is our vision for our children? Our text verse (or title verse) is from Proverbs 29:18. It is interesting to note the context of that verse or at least the verses that come immediately prior to that. Proverbs 29:15–17 read like this. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. (16) When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. (17) Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.” The following verse is our text verse. Thus, if we have no vision in family life for our children, where they will spend eternity, and do not apply that in nurturing and training and correcting our children, they will perish.

Another verse says that “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24). “Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Proverbs 23:14). That will be the eternal consequence of neglecting a vision for our family. We need to have vision of the results of faithful efforts and training, teaching and disciplining our children as necessary. Sparing the rod, not disciplining when we should, not

having the vision for our family, for our children, will lead to damnation for them. Therefore, so we need to use proper discipline and train, and nurture them properly to deliver their souls from hell. The world does not have that spiritual perspective. Therefore, they view child discipline as child abuse. They do not see the spiritual and eternal values, nor the implications of it.

We mentioned personal devotional life in order to maintain a proper vision for our family. It is also essential that we have a proper family devotional life, not only family worship. It is essential that we should have times of worship, but the atmosphere of our family should be ordered around church life and spiritual life and around the things of God. We do not forget the things of God all except for going to church and perhaps our family devotions. It needs to be the tenor of our home — the reason why we do the things that we do. We need to have an explanation for our children, for the reason why we do the things that we do. Therefore, we need to understand them ourselves and have the spiritual insight to pass on.

3) *We need a vision for our church as well.* We need to personally have a vision where our church is going. In order to have

a group vision and a proper group conscience, each of us individually must have the vision as well for our church. Ephesians 4:12, 13 speaks about the gifts that God has given to the Church, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” That verse expresses the vision that we need to have for the Church. We need the unity of the faith. Do we have a burden for the unity of the brotherhood? It also says, “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Is our desire to keep our church unified and for the purpose of magnifying Christ, being a Christ like body?

Also, we need to have a vision for the extension of the church, for the growth of the church both spirituality and in conviction and growth in winning more souls into the kingdom and bringing more into the church. The great commission speaks of going and teaching all nations, making disciples of them, teaching them all things that Christ has commanded us. Acts 1:8 also refers to that, “But ye shall receive power, after

that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

We need to have that vision through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Here it refers to receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. It will drive us to reach out and to go out to win others for Christ. It will give us a vision and a burden for souls, compassion for souls, seeing the need of bringing others into the fold while there is yet opportunity. It is not for our own sake or for the glory of our church, nor so that we can have a large and popular church. Not at all. Rather, it is for the sake of Christ, for the sake of His Kingdom.

In closing yet, I would like to look a bit of the danger of erring in our vision, or of losing our vision. Isaiah 28:7 says, “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.” The prophets here are the ones who should have had a vision for the people of God. They were erring in their vision.

They were losing their vision because of wine. We know the effects that strong drink can have on a person in excess. It can affect their physical vision. Their vision becomes blurred and they no longer see plainly. They lose discernment and judgment. It says they err in vision. “They err in [their] vision,” and “they stumble in judgment,” because of the effects of strong drink.

We can apply that to spiritual life as well. How can we become drunk with wine? Ephesians 5:18 says, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” It may include drinking strong drink here as well, but also we can apply that to the cares of this life and the influences of worldliness and carnality that cause us to lose our spiritual perception. If we are not filled with the spirit of God, something else will fill our lives. If we are filled with things of this world, carnal desires and the lusts of this world, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16), we will be as “drunk” spiritually. We will lose our spiritual perception and we will err in our vision. Let us “be filled with the Spirit,” and not drunken with the cares of worldliness and the things of this life.

Also, in Micah 3:4–7 we have

the people of God again leaving the way of holiness and righteousness. They were involved in gross idolatry of the heathen nations and cultures around them. Notice how it affected their vision, the vision of their prophets. "Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings. (5) Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. (6) Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. (7) Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God."

Notice the horrible condition that they were in because of having turned away from God because they allowed the influences around them, idolatrous influences, to infiltrate their life and practice. The prophets were erring in their vision. They were causing the people to err. It was bringing confusion. Verse 7 talks

about confusion. There is night and darkness. There is no longer a vision in verse 6. It is not talking about the natural sun setting but the light of spiritual perception, of knowing God's will. The light of God had left and they were in darkness. They were left in spiritual night.

We err in our vision, if we leave the way of righteousness, the ways of God. If we become involved in the idolatrous practices around us in society today, it will result in us losing our vision and becoming lost and confused in darkness and in spiritual night. There is hope for us if we maintain our vision. I would like to close with this thought from Proverbs 4:18. We do not need to be lost in darkness and spiritual night, even though that is a very real possibility. We may become lax and fail to press forward to the mark. We will lose out on that vision if we allow ourselves to be infiltrated with worldliness and become involved in the idolatrous practices of our American culture.

It is not kneeling down and worshipping idols and cutting ourselves and such like, but it may be the affluence, the materialism, the status of society, riches, or whatever it may be. The material things of life may become idols to us and it may

cause us to lose our vision and lead us into spiritual darkness and confusion. We need not lose our vision. There is hope for us Proverbs 4:18, “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” The contrary of spiritual night and darkness and losing our vision are those who keep and follow the spiritual vision. If we maintain it and follow the light that we have, the revelation of God that we have through His Word, through His Spirit, the light will shine brighter and brighter for us, “the light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Not everyone has as much light as what we have perhaps, but we are a very responsible

people, very accountable. God has given us light. We have been taught from little on up (most of us) in the ways of God and righteousness. We have the Bible. We have the light and there is no reason why we should not have the vision. If we keep our vision, keep following in God’s way that light can keep growing brighter and brighter. The way can become clearer and clearer to us until it finally opens into eternal day. “unto the perfect day.” May we keep pressing toward the mark. May we maintain a vision. “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” but if we maintain a vision we can look forward to being ushered into the land of eternal light.

Where There is No Vision the People Perish — Proverbs 29:18

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 like-

ly 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, 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 difficult 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 it is 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 our-

selves, 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 the Saviour 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 circle 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 father 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 Ivin Steinhauer 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 Saviour, 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.

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Book Reprint *(continued)* The Seven Laws of Teaching

CHAPTER II THE LAW OF THE TEACHER

1. The universal reign of law is the central truth of mod-

From the Previous Issue:

The Christian Home

From a message by H. Lynn Martin
Wedding service, Saturday, June 17, 1989
Lakeview Conservative Mennonite Church

The Sunday School:

Why We Produce Sunday School Materials

From a message by Eby Burkholder
Saturday, May 27, 1995
Centerville Mennonite Church

ern science. No force in man or nature but works under the control of law; no effect in mind or matter but is produced in conformity with law. The simplest notion of natural law is that nature remains forever uniform in its forces and operations. Causes compel their effects, and effects obey their causes, by irresistible laws. Things are what they are by reason of the laws of their being, and to learn the law of any fact is to learn the most fundamental truth that we can know about it. This uniformity of nature is the basis of all science and of all practical art. In mind and in matter the reign of unvarying laws is the primal condition of any true science. The mind has freedom within law but no liberty to produce effects contrary to laws. The teacher is therefore as much the subject of law as the star that shines or the ship that sails. Many qualifica-

tions are recognized as important to the teacher's position and work; and if all the requirements sought for could be obtained, the teacher would be a model man or woman, a perfect assemblage of impossible excellences. Good character and rare moral qualities are desirable in an instructor of the young, if not for his actual work, at least to prevent harm from his example; but if, one by one, we dismiss from our catalogue of needful qualifications for the work of teaching those not absolutely indispensable, we shall find ourselves obliged to retain at last, as necessary to the very notion of teaching, a knowledge of the subject-matter to be taught.

The Law of the Teacher, then, — the law which limits and describes him,— is this:

The teacher must know that which he would teach.

Philosophy of the Law

2. That we cannot teach without knowledge seems too simple for proof. How can something come out of nothing, or how can darkness give light? To affirm this law seems like declaring a truism: but deeper study shows it to be a fundamental truth, the law of the teacher. No other qualification is so fundamental and essential. If the terms of the law are reversed, another important truth is revealed: *What the teacher knows he must teach.*

3. The word KNOW stands central in the law of the teacher. Knowledge is the material with which the teacher works, and the first reason for the law must be sought in the nature of knowledge. What men call knowledge is of all degrees, from the first glimpse of truth to the full understanding. At different stages the experience of the race, as we acquire it, is characterized by: (1) faint recognition; (2) the ability to recall for ourselves, or to describe in a general way to others, what we have learned; (3) the power readily to explain, prove, illustrate, and apply it; and (4) such knowledge and appreciation of the truth in its deeper significance and wider relations, that by the force of its importance we *act* upon it, — our *con-*

duct is modified by it. History is history only to him who thus reads and knows it. It is this last form of knowledge, or experience, which must be read into the law of the true teacher.

4. It is not affirmed that no one can teach at all without this fulness of knowledge; nor is it true that everyone who knows his subject-matter thus thoroughly will necessarily teach successfully. But imperfect knowing must be reflected in imperfect teaching. What a man does not know he cannot teach successfully. But the law of the teacher is only one of the laws of teaching, and failure may come from the violations of other conditions as well as from neglect of this. Likewise success in some measure may come from obedience to the other laws. However, teaching must be uncertain and limping when characterized by an inadequate knowledge of the material to be taught.

5. A truth is known by its resemblances, and can best be seen in the light of other truths. The pupil, instead of seeing a fact alone, should see it linked to the great body of truth, in all its fruitful relations. Great principles are discovered amid familiar facts vividly seen, and concepts clearly wrought. The power of illustration — a most important tool

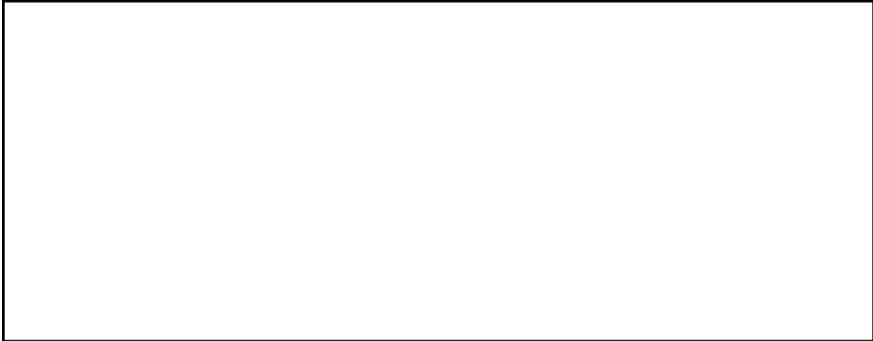
in the teacher's art — comes only out of clear and familiar knowledge. The unknowing teacher is like the blind trying to lead the blind with only an empty lamp to light the way.

6. Consider the common facts taught in the geography of the schools, the roundness of the earth, the extent of oceans and continents, mountains, rivers, and peopled states and cities, how tame and slight in interest to the half-taught teacher and his pupils; but how inspiring as seen by the Herschels, the Danas, and the Guyots! To them appear in vision the long processions of causes which have given shape to the globe. To such teachers geography is one chapter in the science and history of the universe. So, too, with Biblical truths; they are meager in meaning to the careless reader and to the non-studious teacher, but they are brilliant with truth and rich with meaning to those who bring to their study the converging lights of history, science, and indeed all forms of recorded experience.

7. But the law of the teacher goes deeper still. Truth must be clearly understood before it can be vividly felt. Only the true students of any sci-

ence grow enthusiastic over it. It is the clearness of their vision which inspires the wonderful eloquence of the poet and the orator, and makes them the teachers of their race. It was Hugh Miller, the geologist, whose eye deciphered and whose pen recorded "The Testimony of the Rocks." Kepler, the great astronomer, grew wild as the mysteries of the stars unrolled before him, and Agassiz could not afford time to lecture for money while absorbed in the study of the fishes of an ancient world. That teacher will be cold and lifeless who only half knows the subject he would teach; but one fired with enthusiasm will unconsciously inspire his pupils with his own interest.

8. This earnest feeling of truths clearly conceived is the secret of the enthusiasm so much admired and praised in teacher and preacher. Common truths become transformed for such a teacher. History becomes a living panorama; geography swells out into great continental stretches of peopled nations; astronomy becomes the march of worlds and world-systems. How can the teacher's manner fail to be earnest and inspiring when his subject-matter is so rich in radiant reality?



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