

## Understanding Spiritual Blindness

By Rich Jacobs, M.D.

*For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **1 Corinthians 1:18***

*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. **1 Corinthians 2:14***

1. The gospel is foolishness to “unbelievers”, not because they are not intelligent or educated, but because the gospel involves spiritual “issues” they cannot comprehend. Why?
  - a. The principles taught and reinforced by the world are contrary to the principles taught and reinforced in the Kingdom of God. Consider the following examples.
    - i) “Seeing is believing” vs. “Believing is seeing”
    - ii) “Destroy your enemy” vs. “Love your enemy”
    - iii) “Look out for number one” vs. “Unselfishly care for other people”
    - iv) “Self-reliance” vs. “God-reliance”
    - v) “Might makes right” vs. “Right makes might”
    - vi) “The end justifies the means” vs. “Live righteously”
  - b. Worldly behavior tends to lead to immediate gratification and only eventual dissipation. For people without Godly faith, this immediate gratification can reinforce worldly principles.
  - c. Godly behavior is often subject to delayed reward and even short-term sacrifice, which means that it must be sustained by faith, not experience.
  - d. Because the principles of “this world” are “backwards” to Godliness, the “natural man” cannot understand righteous spiritual principles. But this is not the whole explanation.

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places **Ephesians 6:12***

*. . . 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. **2 Corinthians 4:18***

2. There are profound spiritual forces at work all around us that ultimately shape the outcome of world events. These spiritual struggles impact our destinies and influence our lives. A couple of examples serve to illustrate these unseen spiritual forces and the struggles they engage.

*One of his servants said, “No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.” So he said, “Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him.” And it was told him, saying, “Behold, he is in Dothan.” He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around. **2 King 6:12-17***

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- a. The King of Aram could not subvert the King of Israel because the prophet Elisha was able to warn the Jewish king of every Aramaic scheme. Elisha gained this valuable intelligence from the spiritual world because he was able to “see and hear” these private schemes from afar; — he had “supernatural” spiritual powers from the Lord, by faith. These defied natural explanation.
  - i) Notice that Elisha’s servant could NOT see the spiritual forces all around him, which was an angelic army sent by the Lord to protect them. Elisha saw things that were “unseen” because he was not just a “natural man.”
  - ii) Elisha had to invoke a lifting of the veil from his servant’s natural eyes before he too could see the spiritual reality all around them; He prayed and pointed them out.
  - iii) Notice the army of God was already encamped around the Lord’s servant, Elisha.
    - This spiritual force did not have to be summoned, but was already in place in the time of Elisha’s need.
    - This spiritual force was the greater reality that would overcome that “natural” human Aramaic army. Notice there is no demonic army! With the dark forces now dispersed, Elisha was able to inflict the Aramaic army with blindness, but they were already powerless.

*Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” He said, “No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD. . . The captain of the LORD host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” . . The LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. **Joshua 5:13-6:2***

- b. Israel, under Joshua’s command, was about to embark upon the conquest of their Promised Land. Christ Himself gave Joshua instructions on how to overcome this first city in Canaan
  - i) The “man” who appears before Joshua is called “the Captain of the host of the Lord”
    - The phrase “the Captain of the host of the LORD” is could also be translated “the Prince or Lord of the army of YHVH” (Hebrew: *sar-tsvah-YHVH*, שַׂר-צְבָא-יְהוָה). This role for Christ is illustrated more clearly in the New Testament (see **Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 19:11, etc.**)
    - The LORD is also being called a “man”, which literally also refers to the God-man, Jesus Christ
    - The ground was holy near Joshua because of this “man’s” presence, indicating the Divine Presence.
  - ii) This man is also referred to as “the LORD” (Hebrew: *YHVH*, יְהוָה), which is the covenant name of God that was first revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14).
  - iii) He is standing before Joshua with His sword already drawn. This sword is NOT symbolic nor does it merely show a readiness to start the battle. I believe the LORD just came from a freshly-won battle fought against the dark spiritual forces that empowered the physical stronghold at Jericho.
    - According to this scripture verse, the LORD Himself had already given Jericho into Joshua’s hand — it was a “done deal”, the battle was already fought and won for Joshua and Israel.
    - All Israel had to do was obey the LORD, by faith, and march around the city blowing trumpets, as instructed. Joshua and Israel conquered the city without firing an arrow or using a sword or slingshot because the battle was already won!

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- This battle took place right in front of Joshua and Israel, but they were unaware of it because it took place in the spiritual realm and they had “natural eyes”, even though Joshua was a godly man.
3. The minds of men are actively blinded by dark spiritual forces so that we cannot “see” the spiritual realm at work in our midst. This certainly happens to “unbelievers”, but to the extent that our own faith is inadequate, it happens to “believers” as well.

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **2 Corinthians 4:3, 4***

- a. Notice that the message of the gospel is “veiled” to block the ability of the unbelieving to see it. The word “veiled” is translated from the Greek word, *kalupto* (καλύπτω), which means “hidden”. This word in **2 Corinthians** is passive or middle participle, implying that those who are blind have it done to them or do it to themselves. I believe BOTH dynamics are operative in spiritual blindness.
  - b. Notice that it is the “god of this world” (i.e. Satan, through his agents) who are doing the blinding.
  - c. Notice that the “blinding” takes place in the “unbelieving”. The word “unbelieving” is translated from the Greek word, *apistos* (ἀπίστος), which more literally means “without faith”. This refers to those who do not have Godly faith.
    - i. Important Point: All people have faith! Even “unbelieving” have faith in someone or something other than God.
    - ii. Faith represents the of beliefs that we assume to be true about reality. Our faith strongly determines our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, conclusions, and actions.  
Ex 1: The person who believes a certain race of people is inferior and threatening vs. the person who believes that all people are made in the image of God for whom Christ died.  
Ex 2: The person who believes that there is no accountability for undiscovered wrongs vs. the person who believes there is an eventual reckoning for all we do.
    - iii. Just as our faith “system” helps shapes our thoughts and emotions, our thoughts and emotions influences our faith system.
      - THIS REPRESENTS AN INTERNALLY, SELF-REINFORCING, CLOSED LOOP SYSTEM; **beliefs → perceptions → thoughts & emotions → beliefs.**
      - Pride, guilt, and sin “case hardens” this system
    - iv. Spirits, though “unseen”, can directly influence our thoughts and emotions. In this way, they can perpetuate an internally, self-reinforcing, closed loop false faith (consider King Saul and the evil spirit of **1 Samuel 16:14**).
5. The minds of men are actively blinded by these spiritual forces so that we cannot “see” the spiritual realm at work in our midst. This certainly happens to “unbelievers”, but to the extent that our own faith is inadequate, it happens to “believers” as well. Consider non-Christian Israel and the reason for its unbelief.

*But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is*

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read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the LORD, the veil is taken away. **2 Corinthians 3:12-16**

- a. Israel's belief system was rooted in the Mosaic Law (i.e. "whenever Moses is read").
- b. Since Israel placed its faith on something other than Christ, their "vision" was veiled and their minds were "hardened"
  - i. The word translated "hardened" is from the Greek word, "poroo" (πωρόω), "to cover with a callous, to become dull or insensitive, loss of power to understand" (Thayer)
  - ii. Israel could not recognize their own Messiah in spite of His exemplary life, wise teachings, proper genealogy, and miracles. They had a closed, self-reinforcing belief system that rendered them calloused to the truth - spiritually blind.
  - iii. "But whenever a person turns to the LORD, the veil is taken away." This is because one must suspend their belief system long enough to believe there is a LORD to which one may turn; it interrupts the closed belief system.

**Any belief system that is not rooted and grounded in Christ is a false religion that imposes a veil to the Truth on its adherents. The veil only begins to lift when that person openly considers Christ.**

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. . . . **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

- c. Paul's teaching to the Christians at Corinth illustrates the spiritual blindness dynamic and suggests how the veil may be lifted from unbelievers
  - i. The word translated "fortresses" is from the Greek word, "ochuroma" ( ὀχύρωμα), which means "to make strong, anything on which one relies, castle, stronghold" (Thayer).
  - ii. Notice that these "fortresses" consist of "speculations" (not explicitly present in the Greek text), knowledge raised up against God, and disobedient thoughts — the results of a false belief system.
  - iii. We must take not only our own thoughts captive to the Truth, but the thoughts of others by holding them up to the Truth through our testimonies!
  - iii. We overcome these "fortresses" by "the blood of the Lamb", "the word of their testimony", and by the life we live, even if that life costs us everything.

And they overcame him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. **Revelation 12:11**

- a. The sacrifice of Christ has created a holy people who are entitled to intercede with God for others in prayer. This directly engages Godly spiritual forces to reinforce the plan of God. (Hence, the need for holiness for witnessing effectiveness.)
- b. The Bible is the Word of God, which has power to bring a testimony of truth into a closed system of darkness; indeed, it is a "sharp two-edged sword"!
- c. Our personal testimony provides evidence to the unbeliever of a Truth that is completely contrary to their own belief system. When our deeds reinforce our words, we provide compelling evidence for the Truth, which can shatter a false faith, turn someone toward Christ, and lift the veil of spiritual blindness.