

## Four of ONE – Focus can't happen when your eyes are shut

Before Paul even gets into a discussion about forgetting his past and setting his mind down on the present work and future goal of spiritual maturity, he encourages the brethren at Philippi to “Look out...”(3:2). Now, he is primarily speaking to them about the things that would draw them away from maintaining spiritual focus. He calls those things dogs, evildoers and those that mutilate the flesh, which is a reference to Judaism and circumcision, but not true circumcision and thus merely mutilation or “concision.”

Paul will revisit the same subject as he nears the end of the chapter, dwelling more specifically on what we may call false teachers. He says, “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Php 3:18-19). More than likely Paul is talking about the overwhelming and evil influence of two specific groups –Judaizers and the Epicureans. The Judaizers denied the value of the crucifixion of Christ (see Galatians 5, 6). The Epicureans held to a pattern of loose living, fostering a philosophy that may be summed up today in the phrase, “If it feels good do it.” Both served as distractions and a source of spiritual blindness for the Philippian brethren.

The King James Version uses the word “beware.” The ESV says “look out.” Both repeat the words three times in this single verse of scripture, emphasizing the act itself, not just the objects involved. In the Greek the word is *blepete* from the root word *blepo*. It is the same word that medical journals in our day and age use to describe the eyelid. For instance, when a person has plastic surgery on their eyelid it is called *blepharoplasty*. If you ever have an inflammation in your eyelid it is called *blepharitis*. Thus, what Paul is essentially saying is, “You must keep your eyes open. Do not be spiritual blind or ignorant.”

Of course Paul is not talking about literally keeping your eyes open or literal blindness, but the need to be spiritually attentive to that which is happening around you. Many men and women today walk about each and every day pursuing life and its fullness and yet have no spiritual discernment at all. It is as if there is a whole world out there in front of their face and they can't see it. Have you ever met anyone who walked in their sleep? I have known several, but the most memorable was a cousin of mine. One time we went on a camping trip together and something inside of him said, “It is a good night to go for a walk.” He got up from his sleeping spot and proceeded to attempt to kick us all out of the tent because we were “in his fort.” He laid on top of us, rolled over us and then finally, after he had uttered some words we couldn't understand to people who were not there, he dove head first into his sleeping bag, stood up and walked outside where he laid down promptly...on top of the still smoldering embers of the previous evenings fire. It wasn't long until the fire, which was now melting his bag, awoke him. “How did I get here? Why is it so hot?” he cried out, now fully awake. After we extinguished blaze we explained all and he was more than a little embarrassed.

It was odd. The whole time my cousin was walking in his sleep his eyes were wide open and one may have never known he was still actually asleep unless they knew him like we did. Many go through life this way. They seem to exist on this plane of reality where the unimportant and non-existent is essential and meaningful, and almost always ignore the stark reality a facts of existence that a reaffirmed for

them each day. There is no focus, only delusion. In 1 Timothy 5:6 Paul speaks of some self-deluded and self-seeking widows, who are not “widows indeed,” using these terms. “She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives” (1Ti 5:5-6). The Judaizers and Epicureans were in this same boat. However, many Christians were in danger of also taking this ride.

They are much like Jacob, when he has his dream of angels descending and ascending on that stairway to heaven in Genesis 28. When Jacob awakes from his dream he is filled with fear and begins to look at the place where he lay a little bit differently. “Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven”(Gen 28:16-17). Or maybe they are like the servant of Elisha. Elisha and his servant are lodged in a city by the name of Dothan when the king of Syria has the city surrounded looking for Elisha. The servant worries, until Elisha says those now famous words, “Do not be afraid for those who are with us are than those who are with them” just before he opens the servant's eyes so he can see the chariots and horses and fire surrounding the place (2 Kings 6).

To focus you must have good vision, free of spiritual defects, which are abundant. Some are **myopic** (near-sighted) and fail to see the larger plans of God. For them the here and now (things close up) is what matters most. Only things close up are clear and meaningful. Pushing on to any goal spiritually just does not register and even heaven is a concept that is lifeless and flat, not being fully understood. Some, have **hyperopia** (far-sightedness), meaning they see things that are farther away but not close up. They have little concern for what they do in the here and now, thinking it matters little. They can pretty much live how they want and it seems disconnected from the clear picture of eternity. With both of these issues, focus is the issue. When light converges on the eye and reaches focus before the retina then one is myopic. When the light, however, reaches the retina before it can actually focus into a clear image then one is said to be hyperopic. Either way, focus is the issue.

Some are just outright **blind**. They are without the ability to see or discern anything spiritual. Christ would refer to the Pharisees often in these terms (Mt. 15:14). Their greatest blindness was their failure to see Him as the Christ, though they were the keepers of the very scripture that predicted his coming in intimate detail. He came bearing light and sight (Mt. 11:5), but they received none of it (John 1:1-14).

How do we know if we are spiritually discerning and thus able to focus? Most answers to such questions are mimicked in life in some way. Just as we can know that we have a problem with our sight by carefully observing the clarity of all that we see, spiritual focus can be determined by our ability to see the spiritual nature of life as a whole. If that is not clear then let me put it another way. Your spiritual discernment is the ability to see God or not-God in your everyday life. For instance, as read or hear this message and think about why that is do you wonder about such ability? You know medicine is mainly about observation, not understanding. Your doctor can tell you all about your ear or eye and how it functions or does not function, but he cannot explain why when you hear your child's voice you can discern between it and all other voices. Christians, however, know why – God made us that way, with all of these wonderful complexities. So, when you hear your child's or a dear friend's voice, do you think

“God, how great you are?” do we make the opposite observations as well about the things that are not-God?

In the very next chapter Paul even helps us out in this discernment process. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Php 4:8). These are the things from God. If the events, experiences, words, actions and people in your life fit this bill then we must rest assured that they are indeed from God.

### **ONE assignment**

Chapter three of Philippians is a veritable formula for focus. Yet, it is more than that. It is a passionate appeal from one Christian to other Christians to genuinely help them find this focus. You see, Paul once suffered from the same spiritual blindness that plagued so many of his fellow Jews. He could not see the long term plans of God. He could not see the Christ for who he really was and zealously persecuted the church. In many ways Paul never got over that fact, but neither did he let it disrupt this valuable work of helping others gain the same “eyes-wide-open” Christianity. He could see and he desperately wanted others to experience the glory and wonder of his great and awesome God. He wanted to share it!

This week I would encourage you to try to find the spiritual significance of all things in your life since all things can be placed into either the God or not-God category. Pay attention to the little things – the things often taken for granted and connect them to your great and loving God. More specifically, however, I want you to focus on the people in your life. I want you to take a good hard look at those that influence you, the words that they say and the lives that they live and make every attempt to tie that influence to God. When you do find that godly influence I want you to give that person one of the “You help focus me” cards and explain specifically why you are giving it to them. You will each have seven of these – one for each day. If you reach the end of the week and have given out none, though you have tried, then you may want to re-evaluate just who you are letting in your life.