

A Single and an Evil Eye

by Charles Finney

A single and holy eye is essential for spiritual growth, understanding, and decision-making, while an evil eye leads to darkness, delusion, and spiritual blindness.

Scripture: Matthew 6:22

Topics: "Spiritual Clarity", "Consecration to God"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of having a 'single eye' versus an 'evil eye' in our spiritual lives. A single eye represents a mind focused solely on God, leading to clarity, truth, and a deep understanding of duty, while an evil eye reflects a selfish mindset that results in darkness and delusion regarding doctrine and duty. Finney explains that true knowledge and communion with God stem from a state of entire consecration, whereas selfishness clouds judgment and understanding, making the Bible unintelligible. He warns that a selfish minister can mislead their congregation, as they lack spiritual insight. Ultimately, Finney calls for a return to a single-minded devotion to God to dispel darkness and promote unity within the Church.

Transcript

TEXT--Mat. 6:22, 23: 'The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

In this discussion I will show:

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SINGLENES OF EYE.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN AN EVIL EYE.

III. THAT SINGLENES OF EYE WILL INSURE A KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH AND DUTY.

IV. AN EVIL EYE WILL INSURE DARKNESS AND DELUSION, BOTH IN REGARD TO DOCTRINE AND DUTY.

I. What is implied in singleness of eye.

This language is of course figurative. By a single and an evil eye, we are to understand the Savior as representing a state of mind. "The light of the body," He says, "is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." It is a matter of common knowledge, that the eye sometimes becomes so disordered as to discover objects double, and in a manner so obscure or fallacious, as naturally to deceive and mislead the person who possesses it. By a single eye, then, is meant, an eye in its perfect state, when it sees objects as they are, with such distinctness as to give the mind correct information with respect to the objects of vision.

When this figure is applied to the mind, it must represent the supreme and ultimate intention of the mind. When the ultimate end or intention of the mind is single, and just as it ought to be, the eye of the mind may then be said to be single. For the mind has its eye upon but one great absorbing object. This state of mind implies:

1. Supreme love to God. Of course, if the mind has but one great absorbing object or end in view, and that end is right, the end must be supremely to honor, please, and glorify God. This certainly implies supreme love to God.
2. It implies disinterested love to Him. Unless this love be disinterested; that is, unless God is loved for what He is, for his own sake, and not for the sake of making ourselves happy; to honor Him is not a supreme or ultimate end; but our own happiness is the end, and the love and service of God merely a means for the promotion of that end.
3. It implies a state of entire consecration. That Christ intended to be understood, by a single eye, to mean a state of entire consecration to God, is evident from what follows the text. He says-- "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." It is very plain, that the mind's eye is not right, unless the soul is supremely and only devoted to the love and service of God. Nothing less than a state of entire consecration to God can be intended by a single eye.

II. What is intended by an evil eye.

An evil eye is that which has more than one object before it, or sees objects double. When this figure is applied to the mind it means, that state of mind in which objects are seen through a selfish medium, or when the mind has two objects in view, a legal intention to serve God, but an ultimate intention to serve self. By a legal intention to serve God I mean, not that intention which is founded in supreme, disinterested love to God, which aims at honoring and glorifying Him, as an ultimate end; but an intention to serve God as the means of our own happiness, the ultimate intention being self-interest, and the intention to serve God, being a subordinate end.

III. Singleness of eye will insure a knowledge of truth and duty.

1. This is plainly taught in the text: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Light means knowledge, truth. Now when Christ says, if your eye be single your whole body shall be full of light, what less can He mean than that the soul that has a single eye, shall be rightly instructed in all that is essential for it to know.

2. This will be the natural result of singleness of eye:

(1.) Because it will beget honest inquiry.

(2.) It will beget earnest, diligent inquiry.

(3.) It will secure the right and the best use of the necessary means of knowledge.

(4.) It will beget unfailing perseverance in the acquisition of knowledge.

(5.) The state of the will, will not prevent the perception of truth and evidence.

(6.) But the state of the will, will be such as to favor the perception, and insure the reception of evidence, when it is within its reach.

(7.) In this state of mind, the Spirit will not be resisted and quenched; but on the contrary, his influences will be sought and devoutly cherished.

(8.) His instructions will be obeyed, his slightest motions heeded, and the whole soul will be delivered up to his guidance.

(9.) Being in the same state of mind in which God, and Christ, and the inspired writers were, he will naturally understand them. If you have the same end in view, deeply sympathize with God, and are in the same state of mind in which He is, the language in which He expresses his own state of mind, will be to you the most intelligible language possible. Who does not know that persons possessing the same spirit, not only adopt the same or similar language, to express their ideas and feelings, but naturally understand each other's language perfectly? To each other they are perfectly intelligible, while to those in a different state of mind, they are unintelligible, in precise proportion to the diversity of their states of mind. Hence, the Bible is a very unintelligible and uninteresting book to an impenitent sinner. To a Christian of but little experience, who has but little religion, the Bible is in a great measure unintelligible, and he takes comparatively little interest in it; while to the Christian who lives in a state of entire consecration to God, it is not only one of the most intelligible, but altogether the most interesting book in the universe.

(10.) In this state of mind your experiences will be such as to make the teachings of the Bible, and especially the most spiritual portions of the Bible, plain to you. Whenever you are addressed upon a subject upon which you have experience, and in a manner and language that accords with your experience, you understand the speaker or writer with great ease and perfection; but in just as far as he departs from your experience, he is unintelligible to you, in the same manner and for the same reason, as if he spake to you in an unknown tongue. Because, you do not understand language, any farther than it accords with your experience. Words are only signs of ideas; and suppose words are used which are signs of ideas that are not in your mind, you do not get, and cannot possibly get any information from such teaching as this. For to you it is no teaching at all.

(11.) This state of mind will insure great communion and great power with God. The soul that lives in a state of entire consecration to God, can come to Him with as much confidence, and with indescribably more assurance than ever a child came to an earthly parent. This, if you have ever been in this state, you know from your own experience. When you live all the time in a state of such deep communion with God, you feel the strong confidence and assurance, that you know how He feels, by your own experience. Thus you know how Christ feels, from what motives and feelings He gave his life for sinners; and are conscious, that you are willing yourselves to make up in your bodies the sufferings that remain, and to lay down your lives for the world, and for the Church of God. In this state of mind, I say, you will naturally and certainly have great power with God, and will prevail.

IV. An evil eye will insure darkness and delusion, both in regard to doctrine and duty.

1. This is expressly taught in the text: "If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Mark--the whole body shall be full of darkness. Darkness means error and delusion. Now by such language as this the Savior must have intended to teach, that a selfish mind would be, and should be, full of error and delusion, on great questions of doctrine and duty. And by a selfish mind, in this connection, is intended, one that is not in a state of entire consecration to God; but is influenced by selfish considerations.

2. Darkness and delusion will be the natural and inevitable results of this state of mind:

(1.) Because selfishness will prevent inquiry; especially honest, diligent, and persevering inquiry.

(2.) Because the state of the will, will prevent the perception and reception of evidence. Few persons seem to be aware of the extent of the influence of the will, over the decisions of the understanding. I have, for many years, been so circumstanced as to have an opportunity, almost continually, to observe the developments of mind, in this respect; and have often been astonished to see, to what an extent the will influences human opinion. Almost every one has observed, that under circumstances of strong excitement, it is of little or no use to reason with a man, against his prejudices. I have had repeated opportunities to observe, with pain, that prejudice, a committed state of mind, and many other considerations, and things, will so influence the will, as wholly to exclude the light of truth from the understanding. On many subjects, it seems next to impossible to convince a man, against his will; while, on the other hand, a man will believe almost any thing which he is disposed to believe. And the credulity of mankind, on subjects that accord with the state of their will, and in regard to doctrines and things which they are strongly disposed to believe, is as surprising as their incredulity upon subjects opposed to their will. It is amazing to hear infidels and sceptics contend, that human belief is involuntary, and that men necessarily believe what they do, when the real palpable voluntariness of human opinion and belief, on almost every subject, is as striking and apparent to a considerate observer, as almost any fact of human history.

3. A man under the influence of an evil eye, or in other words, a selfish heart, will not practice the truth, and therefore he cannot teach it. There are multitudes of truths, which can be seen and understood no farther than other truths are first seen and understood. And multitudes of truths are never understood, any further than they are experienced. Take, for example, the subject of temperance. Suppose you preach strictly temperance principles to a man who has always been in the habit of drinking ardent spirits freely. Now there are certain things which you can make him understand. If he has been a habitual drunkard, by describing to him the feelings of a drunkard, he can understand you; because upon this subject he has experience. Words are signs of ideas; and to him they will mean nothing more, than the idea represented by the word in his mind. You can therefore make him understand something of the evil of drunkenness; and yet, if he has always been in habits of intoxication, from his earliest recollection, you cannot, in any language whatever, so contrast the experience, follies, and health of a drunkard, with those of a strictly temperate man, as to make him understand you. He knows not what temperance is. He knows not what health is. He knows not what that state of mind is, which is the natural result of temperance and good health. Peradventure, you can fasten conviction upon him, of the great evils of intemperance, from the fact, that he has experience upon that part of the subject; and in this way you can get so much light in upon his mind, as to break him off from his cups. Now in proportion as he becomes a sober man, temperate, and healthy, his experience will enable you so to contrast temperance with intemperance, as

fully to impress his mind with both sides of the question; and thus lodge in his mind the full weight of the momentous considerations in favor of temperance. But in all this process, it is easy to see that he must necessarily begin with the A, B, C of both the doctrines and the experience of temperance. Break him off from ardent spirits, and after a time he is better prepared to see and feel the indispensable necessity of universal temperance. Break him off from every thing that intoxicates, and his experience will soon enable him to understand the importance and necessity of breaking off from all innutritious stimulants in diet. When he has abandoned all these, his experience will, in a little while, enable him to understand the importance of selecting the most bland unstimulating kinds of food. This experience will naturally prepare his mind to understand the importance of universal cleanliness and chastity, the strictest subjection of the appetites and propensities, to the great and universal law of temperance. And in short, as he goes from step to step in reform, and no farther than he does so, is he in circumstances to see, feel, understand, and appreciate arguments in favor of farther reformation.

Now what is true on the subject of temperance, holds true on nearly every practical question; and especially is this true on subjects that pertain to personal holiness. If a man will not practice he cannot learn. Talk to an impenitent sinner of entire sanctification. Holiness is so entirely opposite to his experience, that he does not at all understand you. Talk with him about his sins, and his convictions, his fears, misgivings, and on every subject that is with him a matter of experience, and so far he will understand you; but talk to him of entire sanctification, and he gets no idea of what you mean. Therefore, the only possible way to deal with him is, to begin upon those subjects upon which he has experience, and bring him to see and to feel, that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God. This will lead him to see, admit, and experience the doctrine of repentance. Now proceed, from step to step, lead him forward, and as his experience enlarges, his capacity of understanding about sanctification, its desirableness, its indispensable necessity, will be perceived and felt by him. But no farther than he practices can he properly learn. When he stops and refuses to follow truth any farther in practice, right there the clouds of darkness will shut down, round about him. And it is only as he goes forward, from step to step, practicing or experiencing one truth after another, as it is presented, that he can, by any possibility, come to an understanding and knowledge of the truth. Let it be ever remembered, therefore, that he who will not practice will not learn. In other words, unless his eye be single, his whole body will be full of darkness.

4. Selfishness must render the Bible unintelligible to him who has an evil eye. To him it is a sealed book. It is uninteresting, enigmatical, self-contradictory, and any thing and every thing, but interesting and intelligible. The fact is, its Author and the inspired writers, were in states of mind the direct opposite of selfishness. To a selfish mind they must, therefore, of necessity, speak in an unknown tongue.

5. A selfish mind will not only find the Bible unintelligible, but in a great many instances, will naturally understand it as meaning the direct opposite of what it does mean. Nor is the fault at all in the Bible, or in its Author, but arises necessarily out of a selfish state of mind. For example--when God speaks of being angry with his enemies, as the sinner has never experienced any thing but a selfish anger, he naturally understands God's anger to be like his own. And whenever God speaks of having any state of mind, or doing any thing, sinners naturally interpret this language by their own experience. And thus it comes to pass, as God says, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." Interpreting, as they naturally will, the language of the Bible by their own experience, they ascribe the same motives, affections, and passions to God, which they, themselves have experienced--not understanding at all, that all these states of mind in God are truly and infinitely benevolent.

It is a familiar and a true saying, that men judge others by themselves. To a truly holy mind, the Bible is not only the most interesting, but the most intelligible book in the world; while infidels exclaim, that it is blasphemy to ascribe such feelings and conduct to God; and therefore, that the Bible must be a libel upon his character. Now for this there can be no remedy, only as they become benevolent. If they will but begin to do the truth, so far as they can understand it, and practice one truth after another, until they come into the state of mind, in which the inspired writers were, they will then understand the Bible, and not till then.

6. A man who has an evil eye, will not have the Spirit of God to enlighten his mind in regard to truth, and will, therefore, never understand it.

REMARKS.

1. A selfish minister is a blind leader of the blind. This is the mildest language that truth or inspiration can use, in regard to an ambitious, a temporizing, a man-fearing, and, in short, a selfish minister. His eye is evil. His whole body, as Christ is true, or in other words, his whole mind, is full of darkness on spiritual subjects.

2. Such a minister will certainly, in many things, mislead his flock. He sees no truth spiritually, and therefore cannot safely be trusted as a spiritual guide. Nay, to trust him is ruin and death.

3. Selfish minds are very willing to be led, by selfish ministers, as they naturally see eye to eye. Having similar experiences, they will naturally understand each other. And a carnal church will naturally be pleased with a carnal minister. And a carnal minister will not see the defects of a carnal church. And thus they will be able to walk together, because they are agreed.

4. The doctrine of the text applies to the preparation and delivery of sermons. If a minister's eye is single he will naturally select those subjects of discourse that are suited to the state of his people. He will naturally discuss them in a way, and deliver them in a manner, that will be edifying to the people; simply because that is the object at which he aims. Having his eye single to the holiness of the Church, and the glory of God, it will be perfectly natural for him, in the preparation and delivery of sermons, to do every thing in a manner that will tend to edify and sanctify the people. But if, on the contrary, his object be to secure his salary, play the orator, or promote any selfish interest whatever, he will naturally, and of course, select subjects, prepare, and deliver them, in a manner suited to the end he has in view. If his eye be single, his whole mind will be full of light, in regard to the manner of doing his work. If his eye be evil, his whole mind will be full of darkness, and he will do any thing else, rather than edify and sanctify his people.

5. This doctrine applies to the decision of every question of duty. In selecting fields of labor, courses of life, a companion for life, or any other question of interest and duty, if the eye is single, the whole mind will be full of light. Those considerations only will be taken into the account, and suffered to have weight, that ought to influence the decision of the question. On the other hand, if the eye be evil, the whole body will be full of darkness; and the decision of the question will certainly turn upon considerations that ought to have no influence in deciding the question.

6. If you are not conscious of a single eye, you cannot safely go forward in any thing. If you have already made up your mind upon a question of doctrine or duty, and have not made it up under the influence of a single eye, you may be, and probably are, in some important respects, entirely wrong. If in selecting a course of life, a field of labor, a kind of business, a location; if you have made a bargain, or done any thing else, with a selfish intention, or under the influence of an evil eye; as certain as Christ is true, your whole

body was full of darkness. The whole must be reviewed.

Perhaps it may be objected to this, that many individuals are very much enlightened, and hold true opinions, and are very orthodox, who are yet under the influence of selfishness. To this I answer both from my own experience and the word of God--that they hold the truth only in words. They know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. They are deceived, and you who make the objection are deceived in respect to them, if you think they know the truth.

7. From this subject, it is easy to see why the Church and the ministry are so divided in their opinions. It is because they are so sectarian and selfish in their spirit. It is selfishness, and nothing but selfishness, that divides the Church. When the Church shall come to have a single eye, her watchmen and her members will then see eye to eye; because her body will then be full of light.

8. From this subject you can see the only true way of promoting real Christian Union. It is in vain to talk of destroying sectarianism by destroying creeds. Creeds may perpetuate, but they are not the cause of sectarianism. Selfishness, and nothing but selfishness is its cause. Let universal love and a single eye prevail, and sectarianism is no more. Destroy a sectarian spirit, let it be supplanted by love, and Christians would then be in a state of mind to examine their differences of opinion with candor--to come to such mutual explanations, and so honestly and thoroughly to weigh each others opinions and arguments, as to almost entirely coincide in opinion. But should there still be discrepancy of views, in relation to any points, it would be as far as possible from their thoughts, to withdraw from communion with each other, and to divide into sects and separate departments.

9. From this subject it is easy to see, why ministers feel as if they could not preach--feel as if they had nothing to say--are at a loss to know what to preach--no subject has any such interest as to enable them to preach upon it. When they have fallen into a selfish state of mind their whole body is full of darkness.

10. How infinitely important it is, that this truth should be continually remembered, that an evil eye, or selfish intention, invariably and necessarily brings the mind into great darkness. How many there are, even in the Christian Church, to whom the Bible is a sealed book, who are in great darkness in respect to truth, doctrine, and duty; whose minds resemble an ocean of darkness.

11. How many there are, who have great confidence in their own opinions, who are ready to hazard their souls upon the truth of them, who have made up their minds on the most important and solemn subjects, while under the influence of selfishness--have entered the Christian Church--are hugging their delusions--are following the guidance and instruction of those who are perhaps as much under the dominion of an evil eye, as they are themselves, and whose mind is as full of darkness as their own. And thus they go on, unsuspectingly, while Christ assures them in the most solemn manner, that if their eye is evil, their whole body is full of darkness. Still they believe it not. They have the highest confidence in their own opinions, and in the safety of their state; and thus rush on, with a kind of mad assurance, to the depths of hell!

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