

Signs Seen, and Not Seen

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and understanding signs of God's special favor in our lives, which include the fear of God, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, repentance, faith in the Lord Jesus, and love to God's people.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 14:4, Psalm 74:9-104, Isaiah 1:23, John 13:35, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 16:22, James 1:23

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Gods Presence"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on the lamentation of not seeing the signs of God's favor, highlighting the importance of recognizing outward marks of God's presence and grace upon the soul. He emphasizes that signs such as the fear of God, the spirit of grace and supplication, repentance, faith in Jesus, love for God's people, and the witness of the Spirit are crucial in indicating a genuine work of grace. Philpot delves into the various obstacles like infidelity, unbelief, trials, and spiritual darkness that can obscure these signs, leading to a state of lamentation and soul-searching for the true children of God.

Transcript

A sermon preached on June 20, 1841, by J. C. Philpot, at Zoar Chapel, London.

"We see not our signs." Psalm 74:9

This Psalm, from which the text is taken, is clearly not one of those that were written by the pen of David. We gather this, not merely from the title of the Psalm, where it is called "Maschil" which means "giving instruction" "of Asaph," but also from the strongest internal evidence. For instance, we read in the 6th and 7th verses Psalm 74:6,7, "But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into your sanctuary; they have denied by casting down the dwelling place of your name to the ground." We have no such event as this in the days of David, for the temple at that time was not even built; that privilege being reserved for his son Solomon, because David "had shed much blood upon the earth" 1Ch 22:8.

It evidently points, then, to a period, when the carved work of this temple was broken down with axes and hammers; when fire was cast into the sanctuary; and God's dwelling place, that is, his temple, was defiled by being cast down to the ground. Again, in Psalm 74:8, we read, "They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land." Now, there were no synagogues in the days of David, nor were there any such assemblies until the time of the Babylonish captivity. Thus we have the strongest internal evidence,

that this Psalm was written about that time, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple of God at Jerusalem; and it appears to have been penned by Asaph, a descendant of Asaph the singer, who remained at Jerusalem, and witnessed those desolations, that were committed by the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers.

With respect, then, to the words from which I hope to speak this morning, we find Asaph pouring forth his soul in this bitter lamentation---"We see not our signs." Now, these signs, which he mourned that he did not see, were certain outward marks of God's special favor, certain testimonies of his presence, certain memorials that he was with them to bless them. And it is said, that there were five things in Solomon's temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, which were not in the second temple, which was erected after the Babylonish captivity. Five memorials or tokens of God's special presence were there wanting. One was the ark of the covenant; another, the fire from heaven upon the bronze altar; the third, the Shechinah, or cloud that rested upon the mercy-seat; the fourth, the Urim and Thummin which were in the breast-plate of the high-priest; and the fifth, the spirit of prophecy. For though there were the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, at the time of, and shortly after, the restoration; yet the spirit of prophecy ceased with Malachi, and did not reappear until John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus.

We see, then, that there is a ground-work from these words on which to build up a spiritual and experimental interpretation. We are not warranted to take any words that we find in the Scriptures of truth, and spiritualize them according to our own fancy. Unless there be some groundwork for a spiritual and experimental interpretation, founded upon the literal meaning of the passage, we seem rather to be trusting to our own fancy and imagination, than to "prophecy according to the analogy of faith," and "rightly to divide the word of truth." I never wish to build up an experimental signification upon a passage of Scripture, unless, first, I can find some solid groundwork whereon to build it; and unless, secondly, I can find some life and feeling out of it in my own heart. When we go by what the Spirit of God has recorded in the written word, and by what the same blessed Spirit has, in a measure, traced out in our hearts, we then move upon solid ground, and bear a testimony of which we need not be ashamed.

The lamentation of the church here then was, that she saw not her signs. So now the church of the living God, the regenerate family of Zion, have often reason to pour out the same melancholy complaint. Signs of God's favor, marks, and testimonies of his work of grace upon their souls are often so out of sight, so buried in obscurity, so enveloped in clouds of darkness, that the living family are compelled, from soul-feeling, to take up the language of lamentation here expressed, and say, "we see not our signs."

We gather, then, from these words, that there are such things as "signs," that is, tokens and marks of God's special favor to the soul; that there is also "a seeing" those signs, when God the Holy Spirit is pleased to shine upon them; and that there is a third state, where there is a "not seeing the signs," those signs being enveloped in dimness, darkness, and obscurity.

I. There are such things as "signs," that is, tokens and marks of God's special favor to the soul. "Signs," then, are marks and testimonies of God's favor, memorials and Ebenezers of the Lord's special loving-kindness to us, as "chosen in Christ before all worlds"--as redeemed by the blood of the Son of God upon the cross at Calvary--and as quickened in due time by the Holy Spirit bringing us to a knowledge of ourselves, and to a knowledge of "the only true God, and of Jesus Christ Whom he has sent."

Now, where all signs of God's favor, and all testimonies of his gracious dealings are absent, then we must pronounce the work of grace to be absent. But remember that it is one thing to have a complete absence

of signs; it is another thing not to be able to see them. The absence of signs shows an absence of life; not seeing the signs merely shows that the living soul is in a state of gloom and darkness. There are, then, certain symptoms, marks, and tokens of life in the soul; and where these symptoms or signs are totally absent, then we must pronounce, that that soul is dead in sin, or dead in a profession.

If we look at "signs" generally, there seem to be two classes of them. There are some signs which, were they removed, would not remove the existence of the thing itself. And there are other signs of such a nature, that if they were removed the existence of the thing which they signify would be removed with them. For instance, the crown upon a monarch's head, and the throne on which a monarch sits are signs of royalty. But take away that crown, or remove that throne on which the sovereign sits; the absence of the crown, and the removal of the throne do not take away royalty; the monarch is still a king, though the insignia of his dignity are out of sight. So, to use a more familiar comparison, the milestones upon a road are certain marks of distance and when we come to them, we know how far we have traveled. But these milestones might be all defaced, so as to become illegible, or they might be taken clean away; yet the road and the distance would remain the same. So a bank note is a sign of value; it has no value in itself, it is merely a representative of property, let the bank note be destroyed, still the property, of which it is the sign, remains the same to the company that issued it. Well, these are certain signs or marks of the existence of a thing, and yet, if these signs were taken away, the thing would still exist as it was before.

But there are other signs which are so constituent parts of the thing itself, that if the signs were taken away the thing would, in its measure cease to exist. For instance, at a certain period of the year, the days begin to lengthen--the sun rises higher in the sky, and sets later--the trees put forth their leaves--the flowers appear in the earth--the singing of the turtle-dove is heard in the land--and we say, these are signs of spring. But, suppose that these signs were removed; that the days did not become longer, that the sun did not rise higher, nor continue for a greater space in the skies, that the trees did not put forth their leaves, nor the earth put forth its flowers; why, the very removal of these things would remove spring itself.

There are signs, then, which may be removed, and the thing still exist--and there are signs, the removal of which takes away the thing itself. Now with respect to signs of Divine favor, marks and testimonies of God's special blessing, these signs are chiefly of the latter class, that is, could you take away the signs you would take away that life which is there signified; because the life of God consists in certain feelings, certain manifestations, certain workings, certain breathings which could they be removed out of that man's heart, the life would be removed with them.

But though the chief parts of signs, spiritually considered, are of the second class, I must observe, there are some signs of the first class, for instance, external fruits--the fruits that are visible in a man's life, conduct, and conversation. If these signs are absent, we say that the man is not possessed of spiritual life; but still they might be present and not prove the existence of spiritual life, but might spring from self-righteousness. But the greater part of signs of God's favor, are signs of the second class, that is, their removal implies the removal of that which they point out. We will then, with God's blessing, look a little at some of these signs; and may he assist us to find out, that these signs have been stamped by the Holy Spirit upon our consciences.

1. Now, the first sign, according to the Scripture testimony, is "the fear of God;" for the word of the Lord says, that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," and that it is "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." And therefore, "if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," it must be the first sign of spiritual life, because it is the beginning of spiritual life. He then whose religion began without the fear of

the Lord being implanted from above in his heart and conscience began with God before God began with him; he took up his religion before the Holy Spirit gave him that which constitutes vital godliness. And he that took it up, can lay it down; he that began in his own strength will probably finish in his own weakness. He that lays hold of the things of eternity before the things of eternity lay hold on him, will be able to, and, no doubt, will let go of that which he has thus in the flesh laid hold of. "The fear of the Lord," then, "is the beginning of wisdom," and operates as a fountain of life.

But connected with "the fear of the Lord" in the soul, there are different workings toward that source and fountain, whence this life comes down. In this "fear of the Lord," we feel what sin is. By this "fear of the Lord" we depart from outward evil. By the working of this "fear of the Lord" we are brought into the presence of a heart-searching God. Through the springings up of this "fear of the Lord," as the fountain of life in our souls, we call unto the Lord that he would pardon our sins, manifest himself to our souls, make Jesus known, keep us from evil, and lead us into all truth. Then, "the fear of the Lord" is a living principle in a man's conscience; no dead stagnant pool, but it is a living stream of living water, which is continually gushing up from the bottom of his heart, springing up like the well spoken of in the Scriptures, "Spring up, O well"--springing up in the soul, as the Spirit of the Lord, from time to time, works upon it, and draws it forth into blessed exercise.

2. Another sign of the Lord having chosen us in Christ before all worlds, and redeemed us by the blood of his only begotten Son, is his having poured out upon us "the Spirit of grace and of supplication." This is the testimony which the Lord himself has given us in Zachariah--"I will pour out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication." Now, when "the Spirit of grace and of supplication" is poured out upon the soul, it enables the soul to pour itself out before God; as Hannah said to Eli, when he thought that she was drunken--"No, my Lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit, I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord," that is, she poured out all her feelings, all her needs, all her desires into the bosom of that God, who had brought her to his footstool. And there is no real prayer, in whatever stage or state of experience of the divine life we may be--there is no real prayer, where there is not a pouring out of the soul into the bosom of God, that is, there is, as it were, a casting forth, and a casting down, at the feet of the Lord those burdens, griefs, trials, and difficulties, with which the soul is beset.

Now, this pouring out of the soul does not necessarily imply any great fluency; it does not carry with it the idea of what are called gifts, but it carries with it this idea, that the man unbosoms himself, unburdens himself, earnestly tells out the needs of his heart; and therefore it corresponds with the work of the Holy Spirit spoken of in Romans 8:20--"The Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," or rather, that are not to be expressed. So that these groanings are poured out into the bosom of God, pressed out of us by the heavy burden of guilt, condemnation, temptation, exercise, and sorrow. And he that has never known what it is to feel the Spirit, as a "Spirit of grace and of supplication," enabling him to pour out his soul before the Lord, and he who has never felt the Spirit within him, interceding with "groanings which cannot be uttered," has a mark upon him that he is destitute of that gift, which the Holy Spirit gives to the people of God.

3. Another "sign" of God's special favor is repentance, and this, not "the repentance of the world that works death," not the remorse of the carnal mind, not fleshy sorrow, nor the mere workings of natural conscience, but, as the Scriptures speak, "repentance unto life." "Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life;" or, as it is spoken of in another passage, "repentance not to be repented of." Then this repentance will not consist merely in conviction of guilt, nor pangs of remorse, for this a man

may have, who has no grace in his heart at all, as a criminal upon the gallows may have remorse of conscience, and as murderers have, at times, been so haunted by the remembrance of their crimes, that they have yielded themselves up into the hands of justice, being unable to bear any longer that intolerable load. So in a reprobate, or in a man devoid of the grace of God, there may be, and doubtless there often are, strong pangs of remorse, convictions of guilt, and sensations of the tremendous wrath of God against sin; and yet this is not "repentance unto life," but "the sorrow of the world that works death," the beginning and foretaste of an endless eternity of misery.

But wherever there is "repentance unto life" given by the Holy Spirit, there will not be merely pangs of guilt and convictions of sin, but there will also be implanted a solemn hatred, abhorrence, and detestation of those sins, which lie heavy upon our consciences, and of our own selves, as being so involved in transgression.

4. Another "sign" of God's special favor and mark of his quickening grace, is faith in the Lord Jesus. The message which the apostle preached, was "repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ." The Lord himself went about preaching these words, "Repent, and believe the Gospel." There is, sooner or later, in the heart of every quickened child of God, some measure given to him of faith in the Lord Jesus. Not that this comes at first. In the living family there are different states and stages of experience. There shall be some whom God has quickened into spiritual life, who have the "fear of the Lord" in them, as "the beginning of wisdom," who have had "the spirit of grace and of supplications" poured out upon them, who have repented and are repenting of their transgressions against God, and hate themselves before him; and yet the Lord the Spirit has not yet fulfilled his covenant office, in taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to their souls. For faith in the Lord Jesus Christ arises out of some discovery of Christ to the soul by the Holy Spirit, some bringing of Christ near, some anointing the eyes with eye-salve, whereby a glimpse of Christ's blood and righteousness is received, and his glorious salvation in some measure made known.

Now, until a man gets there, if the Lord has quickened him by his blessed Spirit, he can never find solid rest nor peace; you may doubt a man's religion who can rest satisfied, short of a manifestation of Christ to his soul. Guilt, conviction, the workings of godly sorrow, a deep feeling of self-abhorrence and self-loathing, will so press a man down into the dust, will so strip him of all creature-righteousness, and so empty him of all fleshly religion, that nothing short of application, manifestation, discovery, and gracious revelation of Christ, can ever satisfy his soul, or bind up the wounds of his bleeding conscience. Therefore, write yourselves down as dead in a profession, if you can do without some manifestation and discovery of Christ in your souls.

5. Love to God's people is a sign that God has chosen us in Christ before all worlds; and the Apostle John gives us this as an express mark. He says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life" not merely that we have passed, but "we know that we have passed from death unto life" "because we love the brethren." Now, there are many mistakes made here.

Hypocrites, and rotten professors, and other presumptuous characters--those tares among the wheat, those goats among the sheep, are glad to catch at any evidence to buoy them up--are gladly to lay hold of any sign or testimony whereby they can ease the pangs of an accusing conscience. Many, therefore, lay hold of this testimony in the word, who have never received this testimony inwardly from God. But whom do they love? Those that will flatter them, that will think highly of them, that will back their religion, who run in the same channel of doctrine, or who are in any way kind, and pleasing, and amiable; and this they call

loving the people of God. "They are sure," they say, "that they have passed from death unto life, because they love the brethren."

But do they feel any love to the tried, the exercised, the sin-burdened, the distressed, the Satan-harassed? Do they love the faithful, bold, fearless soldiers of the great Captain of our salvation? Do they love those who will deal honestly with them, and strip off the false coverings that are spread over their hearts, and cannot be bought, by favor nor by gold, to say that which they do not feel. Do they love them? No, they are the last persons that they love. The smooth, the amiable, those who never say a word to ruffle them, nor to inflict a wound upon them, they can love; but the upright, the sincere, the straightforward, simple-hearted, living family, who dare not disguise their real sentiments when they are called to express them, these they hate with a total hatred, and account them their enemies.

Then, before you can write yourselves down to be living souls by the love that you feel to God's people, examine who the people are whom you really do love. Are they the broken-hearted, contrite, mourning, sighing, afflicted family? Do you feel soul-union with them, so as to be united to them with bonds of affection and love, feel a sympathy with them in their sorrows and trials, and not merely feel it, but manifest it by your words and conduct? not acting like those hypocrites spoken of by James, who say, "Be warmed and filled, and give them not those things which are needful to the body," but acting upon that which you profess, and manifesting by your words and actions the deep sympathy of your heart.

6. Love to Christ--that is another "sign" of God's special favor. "Whoever loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema; Maranatha," that is, let him be accursed; the Lord comes. And what solemn words are these spoken by the mouth of an inspired apostle! He must evidently mean, that he who lives and dies without this love to Christ shed abroad in his heart--for he cannot wish for the curse of God to rest upon the living family, who are not yet brought into the enjoyment of the love of Christ, but he who lives and dies without love to Christ--let him be "Anathema;" and this seems to be confirmed by what follows, "Maranatha," that is, "the Lord comes," to avenge himself on that man. Now, wherever there is a measure of faith toward Jesus, there will be a measure of love toward him. Faith and love are just proportionate. Just so much faith, just so much love; so that he that believes on the Lord Jesus, by the sweet testimony of Jesus to his soul will, just in the proportion of his faith, have a measure of love to that Redeemer who has enshrined himself in his warmest and tenderest affections.

7. Again, another "sign" of God's special favor--indeed, I may say, the grand sign of all--is, the witness of the Spirit to our spirits, that we are born of God. Some signs are immediate, other signs are but mediate, that is, they are seen through a medium. Some signs are like the sun shining upon a man's countenance, or into a man's eyes; he believes that which he sees. Other signs are like the same rays shining upon a mirror. They do not shine directly upon him, but he sees them reflected in that bright mirror which catches those beams. So some "signs" are reflected signs, mediate signs, that is, a man has certain feelings in his heart; he looks at the word of God, the glass and mirror of truth Jas 1:23, and he see in it the very experience that he is passing through; and thus heavenly light is reflected from the mirror into his soul.

When the Lord the Spirit then shines upon his own truth in the word, and upon his own work in the soul, he stamps, more or less, a living testimony that the experience is genuine and divine. But, after all, nothing can really satisfy the living soul, but some immediate testimony from God himself. He must have the ray shining, not as reflected in a mirror, but streaming directly and immediately into his soul out of the glorious "Sun of righteousness," the Spirit himself bearing his own blessed inward testimony to his spirit, that he is born again, that he is a child of the living God, that he was chosen in Christ before all worlds, has been

pardoned by atoning blood, has been called by the quickening Spirit, and is sealed an heir of glory.

8. Another sign is, a life and conversation agreeable to the gospel. Uprightness, sincerity, simplicity, humility, a walk which is manifest to others, though not so to ourselves, as becoming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, are signs of the grace of God. And though this evidence is often no evidence to us, because we find so much sin mixed up with all that we say or do, that the evidence seems obscure and dim, and at times utterly lost, yet the family of God, whose eyes are opened to see what truth is, can read this evidence, and more than that, where they cannot read this evidence, they are bound, by the word of God, and by conscience, to stand in doubt of a man's religion. Where, then, there is a decided lack of moral honesty, sincerity, simplicity, uprightnes, and straight-forwardness; or where there is a manifest absence of the fruits of love to the people of God, or of those plain marks and grand outlines of a Christian walk which the Scripture has traced out, in that case, we are bound, unless a man be in a great state of backsliding, we are bound to say, the life of God is absent.

Not but that there are wintry seasons, as I shall presently show, where the tree remains the same, and the fruits are fallen off; but still we expect the tree to bear fruit at some season of the year. If there are no leaves, no flowers, and no fruit at any one period, or at any one season, we are warranted in pronouncing that tree dead.

II. But we pass on to consider, What is the SEEING of these signs? There is, then, such a thing as "seeing a sign;" for, if there were not, why should the complaint have been poured forth? Why should the prophet have so piteously complained, "We see not our signs," unless they were, at times, to be seen! His complaints would be unfounded, were they never visible; and, therefore, the very lamentation shows, that there are times and seasons when the signs can be seen, as well as times and seasons when the signs cannot be seen.

Now, to revert a little to one of our previous illustrations, the way of life is called in the Scriptures a highway, a path, and similar expressions, indicative of a road. Those, then, that travel along this road will have at different intervals certain landmarks, what the Scripture calls "tokens for good"--Ebenezers--"stones of help." Now, what is requisite to see them? Why, surely the main requisite is LIGHT. The landmarks might still be there, the milestones might be every one in their place, their inscriptions might be perfectly legible, and yet, if it were dark, none of these landmarks could be traced out--none of these milestones could be seen. Light, then, is necessary in the soul, in order to "see our signs;" and this light--such a light as is spoken of in the Psalms--"With you is the fountain of life--in your light shall we see light;" corresponding with the Lord's expression, "The light of life." Then the light wherein we "see our signs," is not the moonlight of speculation, nor the frozen northern light of doctrine, nor the meteor light of delusion--nor the phosphoric light, which faintly glimmers from rotten evidences, nor "the sparks of their own kindling," which are elicited by the striking together of flinty hearts and steeled consciences. All this kind of light would be very insufficient to show us the road, stretched out over mountain and valley. We need some clearer, some brighter, some more powerful light, to show the whole extent of the road, that shall run for miles through a country, than a lantern can afford, or any dim light that we ourselves can create. Nothing less than the light of the sun can show us the whole road stretched out into a far distance, and thus, nothing but the light of God, streaming into our hearts, can ever illumine the road, so that we shall "see our signs."

There are times, then, when the Lord is pleased to revive his work in our souls, to draw forth those graces which he himself has implanted, and to shine upon that which he himself has produced. Sometimes, for

instance, the fear of the Lord is acted upon by the blessed Spirit, and it rises up as a fountain of life. Some evidence is then afforded us, and we derive some comfort from the testimony that we have in us--not a dead profession, not a seared conscience, not a hard heart; that we are not abandoned to the power of sin, not given up to utter recklessness; but that we have a fountain of life springing up in contrition, in godly sorrow, in aspirations and breathings after the Lord, to manifest his special blessings.

So again, with respect to the sign of "the spirit of grace and of supplication." When this "spirit of grace and of supplication" is drawn forth into blessed exercise, a man has an inward testimony, that he is "praying in the Spirit," he feels that he is worshiping God "in spirit and in truth"--that he is drawing near to the throne of the Most High; that there is a power--a supernatural power, which is working in his soul, and enabling him to pour out his petitions and desires at God's feet. A man who has received "the spirit of grace and supplications" knows when his soul is favored therewith. If not, there is every reason to believe that he has never received it at all.

So, when a man is brought to loathe himself in "dust and ashes," and mourns, and sighs, and "groans, being burdened" with the sins in which he is entangled, with the snares and traps in which his feet have been caught, and to abhor himself as a beast before God--so far as his soul is humbled and broken within him, he has some evidence, some "sign," that he is not "given over to a reprobate mind"--he has some inward testimony, that he is not one of those, who roll sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues, and have no sorrow for their baseness and vileness before a heart-searching Jehovah; and though it can bring him no ease, nor give him peace of conscience, nor remove the guilt, yet he is, in some measure, brought to a brokenness of heart and tenderness of spirit; and he would a million times sooner be in the dust of humiliation and the posture of confession, than hardened in recklessness, or confident in presumption.

So again, when he has some measure of faith in Christ--when he is able to realize, more or less, according to the Spirit's operation, the blood, the righteousness, and the grace of Immanuel--when faith is drawn forth into exercise, and, spreading her arms, embraces Christ, as he is spiritually made known, there is some evidence, mark, symptom, or "sign," that he has a saving interest in this great redemption; and he has that in his soul, which, more or less, satisfies him and persuades him--not very deeply, perhaps, not very powerfully, not very abidingly--but while it lasts, while the heavenly sensations continue, before the vision is removed, gently and yet sweetly testifies to him of his eternal interest in the blood of the Lamb.

So, when he loves the people of God, and feels his heart burns with affection towards them, experiences a knitting of soul to the poor and tempted and exercised and tried and harassed family, and feels that there is no insincerity in his affection, but that there is a real communion of spirit, and a tender sympathy of soul--when these sensations are experienced, as long as the blessed feeling is in exercise, there is some sweet testimony that he has "passed from death unto life," because he loves God's living family.

But above all, when "the Sun of righteousness" is pleased to shine, and the Spirit himself bears its immediate testimony--then, above all things--then, above all times and seasons, will he have the testimony, will he see his signs, and be able to see his name written among the living; in Jerusalem.

III. "NOT seeing the signs." But we must turn to the other side of the picture. Most ministers are all for the bright side--all for speaking of consolation--of the Spirit's blessed testimony in the soul, and how the children of God walk in light and life and liberty and love. What is the consequence? They build up hypocrites, and they plaster with "untempered mortar" those that are dead in a profession; while they

distress and trouble the living family who have tender consciences, and know that matters are usually very different with them. We must have, then, both sides of the question. We read in this Psalm Psalms 74:16,17, and it is a sweet testimony of the Lord, "The day is yours;" "Yes," says the dead Calvinist, "that is plain enough"--"the night also is yours." What do you think of that? "You have made summer;" "Yes," says the dry doctrinal professor, "God makes summer--it in always summer with me." But listen to what the Lord goes on to say, "and winter;" then the Lord "makes winter." Now, if you only know the Lord that made the day, and never knew the Lord that made the night--if you only know the Lord that made the summer, and do not know the Lord that made the winter, you do not know the God of the Bible, you do not know him as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures; then do not think that you know the "only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent," unless you know him as he has discovered himself in the Scriptures, as making day and night, summer and winter. There is, then, the night and the winter of the soul. When it is brought into this state, "we see not our signs," and the sweet testimonies are lost, not really, but experimentally; not lost out of the heart by the removal of their existence, but lost out of the feelings by a beclouding of them.

But to pursue the figure which I was just employing. What was requisite to see the signs? Day, bright day, the glorious sun in the sky, casting his blessed beams over mountain and dale, and flood and field, was necessary to see the broad landscape. The absence, then, of this, the withdrawal of this glorious orb of day, will produce just the contrary result to us; and when the soul is brought into this state, "we see not our signs." Now, these shades of darkness may be various.

For instance, there may rise up from some deep mine a cloud of pitchy smoke, which, as it rolls forth, shall cover the hemisphere, and so obscure all the path that is stretched out before the eyes. Such is infidelity, that black cloud, that column of murky, pitchy darkness, which rises out of the bottomless pit. When infidelity comes, with its clouds of pitchy darkness, into a man's soul, it obscures, buries, hides all his signs, because it spreads itself over the very foundations of truth; as the Psalmist says, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Bunyan has a striking expression on this point. Alluding to these feelings of infidelity, he says, "It is as though my belt were taken from me," that is, his garments were no longer in a fit state for him, "to run with patience the race set before him," but all his joints were unloosed, and he was in a state of absolute weakness. So, when this black, murky cloud of infidelity comes from the depths of the bottomless pit, it so darkens and obscures the word of God, and our experience, every outward as well as every inward testimony, that we are utterly unable to see any one sign, either the being of a God, or the existence of Christ, or the teaching of the Holy Spirit, or anything of a divine work upon our hearts and consciences.

But this road of which I was speaking, might be obscured by a fog coming over the face of the sky. Suppose you and I were standing on some lofty mountain, and we were gazing upon the outstretched prospect, and admiring the beautiful valleys, and the fruitful fields, and the flowing rivers, and the mountain lakes, and not only saw these, but saw also the road which we had been traveling, the different elevations over which we had come, the valleys in which we had been hidden, the village spires which we had marked upon our road, and the towns through which we had passed. Well, suppose while we stood looking upon the prospect, clouds gathered round about us, and mists and fogs came down from the upper regions of the sky. Would they not envelope not only the top of the mountain, but envelope us also who were standing there? Where is the road? or rather, where is our sight of the road? Are not all the landmarks gone? Is not the whole landscape obscured and dimmed, and with it the road we have traveled completely lost from our view?

Well, thus it is with the mists and fogs of unbelief that rise in a man's carnal mind, and spread themselves over the whole work of God in his soul. These mists and fogs hide all our evidences, obscure all our testimonies, envelop in deep obscurity the workmanship of God, and thus "we see not our signs." No fear of God in the soul, no godly sorrow for sin, no love to Christ, no love to the people of Christ, no sweet testimony of our interest in the blood of the Lamb can be seen; all are dimmed, obscured, and darkened by these mists and fogs that have spread themselves over our souls.

But there may be a third cause why we cannot see our signs. A man shall have traveled over many miles of country, and after he has journeyed over this long and waste tract, he shall come into a valley, into some deep depression between rising mountains. Can he see his road? Why, no. There are mountains behind and mountains before; and these mountains shut out the road, so that he cannot look back upon the path that he has passed, and can only see just the spot where he is at the present moment. So, when the living soul gets into the valley of trouble, "the valley of Achor," as the Scripture speaks, into the valley of confusion, the valley of darkness, the valley of soul-temptation, the valley of self-abhorrence and self-loathing; why, these mountains behind, and these mountains before, block out his prospect. When he would gladly look behind him to see the road he has traveled, there is a huge, black, desolate, rocky mountain, so that he cannot see the road that he has passed over; it is blocked up, and he only wonders how he got where he is. But he IS there, and he cannot get out. And then the road before him, he cannot see it, for there are mountains before him as well as mountains behind him. Bozez in front, and Seneh in the rear 1Sa 14:4.

Well then, these mountains of trial, of difficulty, and of temptation, these rough and rugged mountains which stretch forth their lofty peaks into the sky, seem impassable for his galled and aching feet, and not merely impassable, but they block out all view of that heavenly country to which he is tending, and where he is dragging his weary and toiling steps. He cannot "see his signs;" the Ebenezers are hidden, the milestones which have tracked his path are altogether out of sight by the obstacles that intervene between him and them.

But we read also that "the sun knows his going down," and that "the Lord makes darkness, and it is night" Psalm 104:19,20. So the child of God sometimes shall lose all sight of his signs by the sun going down upon them. There are different ways of not seeing the landmarks; there is the going down of the sun and the night coming on, as well as the murky clouds of infidelity, the mists and fogs of unbelief, and the high rocky mountains which block in the valley of humiliation. So the child of God sometimes shall come into a state of darkness, and cannot tell how he came there. But he is in darkness because the sun has set, though he has never moved from the spot; for the sun goes down just as much upon one who stands still, as upon one who is traveling. Thus a man might stand upon this mountain that I have been describing, but when the sun went down, the landscape would be lost; it would be all dimmed and obscured from his view. So when the "Sun of Righteousness" goes down, when the Lord "makes it dark," and all the beams and rays out of that glorious fountain of light are removed by the withdrawal of the orb itself; then darkness covers the man's heart, he gropes for the wall like the blind, and he gropes as if he had no eyes, he stumbles in desolate places like dead men. All is dark around him and he is dark to it. He can neither see his signs, nor see the sun which makes these signs visible. And he sits mourning in darkness, until the Lord is pleased, once more, to cause the sun to rise upon his soul.

Such then is, more or less, the chequered path of the Christian--such is a feeble sketch of the way in which the Lord leads his people through this waste wilderness. But God's people cannot be satisfied with "not seeing their signs." It is a subject of mournful complaint with them. The hypocrites in Zion catch up the

language of the saints, for there is nothing more easily picked up, than a few of the expressions which are in the mouth of God's tried family. You will find professors, whom God has never quickened into spiritual life, when they are in the company of God's people, hanging down their heads like bulrushes, and imitating and aping the gestures and language of the living family of Zion. "I am so dark, so dead, so carnal, so unbelieving." You are quite right, you are so because you always were so--you never were otherwise. No doubt you are dead, because you are dead in sin; no doubt you are carnal, because you never were spiritual; no doubt you are unbelieving, for God never gave you living faith; no doubt you are cold, for you have never had a ray of warmth out of the Sun of righteousness. It is not, then, being dead and cold and carnal, but it is what we feel in these seasons.

A traveler, who was journeying over and exploring the rocky Alps, if the sun were to go down or fogs were to arise, would not say, "How dark it is here! I am in darkness; surely I am right now. Oh! the sun is gone down, it is an evidence that I am in the right road;" and feel a kind of pleasure at the very darkness which surrounds him, and hides the landscape from his view. Were he thus to congratulate himself; should we not say he was a fool or a madman? So for one professing to stand upon the very brink of eternity to say, "I am dark, I am dead, I am carnal, I am worldly, I am covetous"--to pick up these feelings as so many evidences, gather up this counterfeit money, and spread it abroad as solid gold, go with this base coin in his hand among the family of God, to pass it off as from heaven's mint--why, every living soul should snatch it out of his hand, and strike a nail through it, that it may stand as an evidence on the counter that the money is forged.

The living soul may be, and continually is, barren, dark, stupid, carnal and dead, but he cannot congratulate himself upon his deadness, nor rejoice in his darkness, nor take an evidence from his barrenness. It will be, as the Lord the Spirit works in him, a subject of complaint with him, it will be his grief, his trouble, his plague, his burden; he can no more take comfort from his disease, that a man in a consumption can take comfort from his cough, or a man in a fever from his burning sensations of heat, or a man who has fallen from a building can take pleasure in his broken limb. He will want a cure, a blessed remedy; he will want life instead of death, light instead of darkness, spirituality instead of carnality, heavenly-mindedness instead of worldliness, a heart enlarged to run the way of God's commandments, instead of sluggishness, slothfulness, and carelessness. "We see not our signs," it is the language of lamentation.

Now where are you? Are you there? You never have been there, if you have not had signs. And if there were not any signs to see, why does the prophet who penned this Psalm say, mourning, "we see not our signs!" For the same reason that some of the Jews wept, when they saw the second temple erected upon the ruins of the first. Why did they weep? It was not because the temple was not so large a temple as the preceding; that did not grieve them, for the second temple was, in some respects, a nobler and more beautiful building than the first, but the glory of the Lord had departed--that made them weep. "Ichabod" was written upon the walls. The ark of the covenant, the Shechinah, the Urim and the Thummin, the fire upon the bronze altar, and the Spirit of prophecy had all departed. The Lord had left the house, and that was the reason why the elders wept, while the younger, who had never seen the presence of the Lord, rejoiced.

Apt emblem, striking illustration, of the difference between the living soul and the dead professor! The temple shorn of its glory, and the departure of that which was all its ornament and all its beauty, made the elders mourn and weep. But the younger rejoiced in the external beauty of the temple, for they knew nothing of that inward glory which had departed when the Lord was justly provoked with their iniquities,

and gave up the building which he had consecrated by his presence, to be spoiled by the Chaldeans.

So the living soul will be mourning and complaining that he sees not his signs, while the mere empty professor of religion will be looking at the external beauty of the building, admiring the harmony of the doctrines, the grand scheme of salvation, the glorious plan of the covenant, and the fair proportions traced out in God's word, while he knows nothing of the inward glory of the temple in the manifested presence of God. But what avails admiration of the columns and architecture of the building without, if he knows nothing of the ark of the covenant within the temple sprinkled with blood; nor of the fire from heaven on the bronze altar; nor of the Shechinah--the divine presence as a cloud on the mercy seat; nor of the Urim and Thummin, those oracles of God to teach him, and warn him when he turns to the right hand, or to the left; nor of the Spirit of prophecy, whereby he is enabled to pour out his soul in inspired language, and offer up to God those feelings with which the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of grace and of supplication," indites in his heart.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/signs-seen-and-not-seen/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net