

Walking by Sight, and Walking by Faith

by John Wesley

True Christian believers walk by faith, not by sight, and regulate their judgments and desires by the invisible and eternal world.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21, John 14:6, Romans 8:14, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:2, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 11:1, 1 Peter 1:4, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Eternal Perspective", "Faith vs. Sight"

Description

John Wesley emphasizes the distinction between walking by faith and walking by sight, asserting that true Christians, who are children of God, live by faith in the invisible and eternal world rather than by the visible and temporal. He explains that while the world relies on sensory perception, faith allows believers to perceive spiritual truths and realities beyond human understanding. Wesley urges his audience to evaluate their lives and desires based on eternal values rather than worldly standards, warning against the dangers of dissipation and the fleeting nature of earthly pursuits. He calls for a life that is focused on God and the eternal, encouraging believers to set their affections on things above. Ultimately, Wesley highlights that true religion is living in and walking towards eternity, grounded in faith and love.

Transcript

"We walk by faith, not by sight." 2 Cor. 5:7.

1. How short is this description of real Christians! And yet how exceeding full! It comprehends, it sums up, the whole experience of those that are truly such, from the time they are born of God till they remove into Abraham's bosom. For, who are the we that are here spoken of? All that are true Christian believers. I say Christian, not Jewish, believers. All that are not only servants, but children, of God. All that have "the Spirit of adoption, crying in their hearts, Abba, Father." All that have "the Spirit of God witnessing with their spirits, that they are the sons of God."

2. All these, and these alone, can say, "We walk by faith, and not by sight." But before we can possibly "walk by faith," we must live by faith, and not by sight. And to all real Christians our Lord saith, "Because I live, ye live also:" Ye live a life which the world, whether learned or unlearned, "know not of." "You that," like the world, "were dead in trespasses and sins, hath he quickened," and made alive; given you new senses, -- spiritual senses, -- "senses exercised to discern spiritual good and evil."

3. In order thoroughly to understand this important truth, it may be proper to consider the whole matter. All the children of men that are not born of God "walk by sight," having no higher principle. By sight, that is, by sense; a part being put for the whole; the sight for all the senses; the rather, because it is more noble and more extensive than any, or all the rest. There are but few objects which we can discern by the three inferior senses of taste, smell, and feeling; and none of these can take any cognizance of its object, unless it be brought into a direct contact with it. Hearing, it is true, has a larger sphere of action, and gives us some knowledge of things that are distant. But how small is that distance, suppose it were fifty or a hundred miles, compared to that between the earth and the sun! And what is even this in comparison of the distance of the sun and moon and the fixed stars! Yet the sight continually takes knowledge of objects even at this amazing distance. **

4. By sight we take knowledge of the visible world, from the surface of the earth to the region of the fixed stars. But what is the world visible to us, but "a speck of creation," compared to the whole universe? to the invisible world? -- that part of the creation which we cannot see at all, by reason of its distance; in the place of which, through the imperfection of our senses, we are presented with an universal blank. 5. But beside these innumerable objects which we cannot see by reason of their distance, have we not sufficient ground to believe that there are innumerable others of too delicate a nature to be discerned by any of our senses? Do not all men of unprejudiced reason allow the same thing, (the small number of Materialists, or Atheists, I cannot term men of reason,) that there is an invisible world, naturally such, as well as a visible one? But which of our senses is fine enough to take the least knowledge of this? We can no more perceive any part of this by our sight, than by our feeling. Should we allow, with the ancient poet that,

Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth

Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep;

should we allow, that the great Spirit, the Father of all, filleth both heaven and earth; yet is the finest of our senses utterly incapable of perceiving either Him or them.

6. All our external senses are evidently adapted to this external, visible world. They are designed to serve us only while we sojourn here, -- while we dwell in these houses of clay. They have nothing to do with the invisible world; they are not adapted to it. And they can take no more cognizance of the eternal, than of the invisible world; although we are as fully assured of the existence of this, as of anything in the present world. We cannot think death puts a period to our being. The body indeed returns to dust; but the soul, being of a nobler nature, is not affected thereby. There is, therefore, an eternal world, of what kind soever it be. But how shall we attain the knowledge of this? What will teach us to draw aside the veil "that hangs 'twixt mortal and immortal being?" We all know, "the vast, the unbounded prospect lies before us;" but we are not constrained to add, "Yet clouds, alas! and darkness rest upon it."

7. The most excellent of our senses, it is undeniably plain, can give us no assistance herein. And what can our boasted reason do? It is now universally allowed, *Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuit prius in sensu*: "Nothing is in the understanding, which was not first perceived by some of the senses." Consequently, the understanding, having here nothing to work upon, can afford us no help at all. So that, in spite of all the information we can gain, either from sense or reason, both the invisible and eternal world are unknown to all that "walk by sight."

8. But is there no help? Must they remain in total darkness concerning the invisible and the eternal world? We cannot affirm this: Even the Heathens did not all remain in total darkness concerning them. Some few

rays of light have, in all ages and nations, gleamed through the shade. Some light they derived from various fountains touching the invisible world. "The heavens declared the glory of God," though not to their outward sight: "The firmament showed," to the eyes of their understanding, the existence of their Maker. From the creation they inferred the being of a Creator, powerful and wise, just and merciful. And hence they concluded, there must be an eternal world, a future state, to commence after the present; wherein the justice of God in punishing wicked men, and his mercy in rewarding the righteous, will be openly and undeniably displayed in the sight of all intelligent creatures.

9. We may likewise reasonably suppose, that some traces of knowledge, both with regard to the invisible and the eternal world, were delivered down from Noah and his children, both to their immediate and remote descendants. And however these were obscured or disguised by the addition of numberless fables, yet something of truth was still mingled with them, and these streaks of light prevented utter darkness. Add to this, that God never, in any age or nation, "left himself" quite "without a witness" in the hearts of men; but while he "gave them rain and fruitful seasons," imparted some imperfect knowledge of the Giver. "He is the true Light that" still, in some degree, "enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world."

10. But all these lights put together availed no farther than to produce a faint twilight. It gave them, even the most enlightened of them, no *elegchos*, no demonstration, no demonstrative conviction, either of the invisible or of the eternal world. Our philosophical poet justly terms Socrates, "The wisest of all moral men;" that is, of all that were not favoured with Divine Revelation. Yet what evidence had he of another world, when he addressed those that had condemned him to death? -- "And now, O ye judges, ye are going to live, and I am going to die. Which of these is best, God knows; but I suppose no man does." Alas! What a confession is this! Is this all the evidence that poor dying Socrates had either of an invisible or an eternal world? And yet even this is preferable to the light of the great and good Emperor Adrian. Remember, ye modern Heathens, and copy after his pathetic address to his parting soul. For fear I should puzzle you with Latin, I give it you in Prior's fine translation: --

Poor, little, pretty, fluttering thing,

Must we no longer live together?

And dost thou prune thy trembling wing,

To take the flight, thou know'st not whither?

Thy pleasing vein, thy humorous folly,

Lies all neglected, all forgot!

And pensive, wavering, melancholy,

Thou hop'st and fear'st, thou know'st not what.

11. "Thou know'st not what!" True, there was no knowledge of what was to be hoped or feared after death, till "the Sun of Righteousness" arose to dispel all their vain conjectures, and "brought life and immortality," that is, immortal life, "to light, through the Gospel." Then (and not till then, unless in some rare instances) God revealed, unveiled the invisible world. He then revealed himself to the children of men. "The Father revealed the Son" in their hearts; and the Son revealed the Father. He that of old time "commanded light

to shine out of darkness shined in their hearts, and enlightened them with the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

12. It is where sense can be of no farther use, that faith comes in to our help; it is the grand _desideratum_; it does what none of the senses can; no, not with all the helps that art hath invented. All our instruments, however improved by the skill and labour of so many succeeding ages, do not enable us to make the least discovery of these unknown regions. They barely serve the occasions for which they were formed in the present visible world.

13. How different is the case, how vast the pre-eminence, of them that "walk by faith!" God, having "opened the eyes of their understanding," pours divine light into their soul; whereby they are enabled to "see Him that is invisible," to see God and the things of God. What their "eye had not seen, nor their ear heard neither had it entered into their heart to conceive," God from time to time reveals to them, by the "unction of the Holy One, which teacheth them of all things." Having "entered into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," by that "new and living way," and being joined unto "the general assembly and church of the first-born, and unto God the Judge of all, and Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant," -- each of these can say, "I live not, but Christ liveth in me;" [Gal. 2:20] I now live that life which "is hid with Christ in God;" "and when Christ, who is my life, shall appear, then I shall likewise appear with him in glory."

14. They that live by faith, walk by faith. But what is implied in this? They regulate all their judgments concerning good and evil, not with reference to visible and temporal things, but to things invisible and eternal. They think visible things to be of small value, because they pass away like a dream; but, on the contrary, they account invisible things to be of high value, because they will never pass away. Whatever is invisible is eternal; the things that are not seen, do not perish. So the Apostle: "The things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal." Therefore, they that "walk by faith" do not desire the "things which are seen;" neither are they the object of their pursuit. They "set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth." They seek only the things which are "where Jesus sitteth at the right hand of God." Because they know, "the things that are seen are temporal," passing away like a shadow, therefore they "look not at them;" they desire them not; they account them as nothing; but "they look at the things which are not seen, that are eternal," that never pass away. By these they form their judgment of all things. They judge them to be good or evil, as they promote or hinder their welfare, not in time, but in eternity. They weigh whatever occurs in this balance: "What influence has it on my eternal state?" They regulate all their tempers and passions, all their desires, joys, and fears, by this standard. They regulate all their thoughts and designs, all their words and actions, so as to prepare them for that invisible and eternal world to which they are shortly going. They do not dwell, but only sojourn here; not looking upon earth as their home, but only

^Travelling through Immanuel's ground,

To fairer worlds on high.^

15. Brethren, are you of this number, who are now here before God? Do you see "Him that is invisible?" Have you faith, living faith, the faith of a child? Can you say, "The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"? Do you "walk by faith?" Observe the question. I do not ask, whether you curse, or swear, or profane the Sabbath, or live in any outward sin. I do not ask, whether you do good, more or less; or attend all the ordinances of God. But, suppose you are blameless in all these respects, I ask, in the name of God, by what standard do you judge of the value of things? by

the visible or the invisible world? Bring the matter to an issue in a single instance. Which do you judge best, -- that your son should be a pious cobbler, or a profane lord? Which appears to you most eligible, -- that your daughter should be a child of God, and walk on foot, or a child of the devil, and ride in a coach-and-six? When the question is concerning marrying your daughter, if you consider her body more than her soul, take knowledge of yourself: You are in the way to hell, and not to heaven; for you walk by sight, and not by faith. I do not ask, whether you live in any outward sin or neglect; but, do you seek in the general tenor of your life, "the things that are above," or the things that are below? Do you "set your affection on things above," or on "things of the earth?" If on the latter, you are as surely in the way of destruction, as a thief or a common drunkard. My dear friends, let every man, every woman among you, deal honestly with yourselves. Ask your own heart, "What am I seeking day by day? What am I desiring? What am I pursuing? earth or heaven? the things that are seen, or the things that are not seen?" What is your object, God or the world? As the Lord liveth, if the world is your object, still all your religion is vain.

16. See then, my dear brethren, that from this time, at least, ye choose the better part. Let your judgment of all the things round about you be according to the real value of things, with a reference to the invisible and eternal world. See that ye judge everything fit to be pursued or shunned, according to the influence it will have on your eternal state. See that your affections, your desire, your joy, your hope, be set, not on transient objects, not on things that fly as a shadow, that pass away like a dream; but on those that are incapable of change, that are incorruptible and fade not away; those that remain the same, when heaven and earth "flee away, and there is no place found for them." See that in all you think, speak, or do, the eye of your soul be single, fixed on "Him that is invisible," and "the glories that shall be revealed." Then shall "your whole body be full of light:" Your whole soul shall enjoy the light of God's countenance; and you shall continually see the light of the glorious love of God "in the face of Jesus Christ."

17. See, in particular, that all your "desire be unto him, and unto the remembrance of his name." Beware of "foolish and hurtful desires;" such as arise from any visible or temporal thing. All these St. John warns us of, under that general term "love of the world." [1 John 2:15] It is not so much to men of the world, as to the children of God, he gives that important direction: "Love not the world, neither the things of the world." Give no place to "the desire of the flesh," -- the gratification of the outward senses, whether of the taste, or any other. Give no place to "the desire of the eye," -- the internal sense, or imagination, -- by gratifying it, either by grand things, or beautiful, or uncommon. Give no place to "the pride of life," -- the desire of wealth, of pomp, or of the honour that cometh of men. St. John confirms this advice by a consideration parallel to that observation which St. Paul had made to the Corinthians: "For the world and the fashion of it passeth away." [1 John 2:16, 17] "The fashion of it" -- all worldly objects, business, pleasures, cares, whatever now attracts our regard or attention -- "passeth away," -- is in the very act of passing, and will return no more. Therefore desire none of these fleeting things, but that glory which "abideth for ever."

18. Observe well: This is religion, and this alone; this alone is true Christian religion; not this or that opinion, or system of opinions, be they ever so true, ever so scriptural. It is true, this is commonly called faith. But those who suppose it to be religion are given up to a strong delusion to believe a lie, and if they suppose it to be a sure passport to heaven are in the high road to hell. Observe well: Religion is not harmlessness; which a careful observer of mankind properly terms hellish harmlessness, as it sends thousands to the bottomless pit. It is not morality; excellent as that is, when it is built on a right foundation, -- loving faith; but when otherwise, it is of no value in the sight of God. It is not formality, -- the most exact observance of all the ordinances of God. This, too, unless it be built on the right foundation, is no more pleasing to God, than "the cutting off a dog's neck." No: Religion is no less than living in eternity, and

walking in eternity; and hereby walking in the love of God and man, in lowliness, meekness, and resignation. This, and this alone, is that "life which is hid with Christ in God." He alone who experiences this "dwells in God, and God in him." This alone is setting the crown upon Christ's head, and doing his "will on earth as it is done in heaven."

19. It will easily be observed, that this is the very thing that men of the world call enthusiasm, -- a word just fit for their purpose, because no man can tell either the meaning or even the derivation of it. If it has any determinate sense, it means a species of religious madness. Hence, when you speak your experience, they immediately cry out, "Much religion hath made thee mad." And all that you experience, either of the invisible or of the eternal world, they suppose to be only the waking dreams of a heated imagination. It cannot be otherwise, when men born blind take upon them to reason concerning light and colours. They will readily pronounce those to be insane who affirm the existence of those things whereof they have no conception.

20. From all that has been said, it may be seen, with the utmost clearness, what is the nature of that fashionable thing called dissipation. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear! It is the very quintessence of Atheism; it is artificial, added to natural, ungodliness. It is the art of forgetting God, of being altogether "without God in the world;" the art of excluding him, if not out of the world he has created, yet out of the minds of all his intelligent creatures. It is a total studied inattention to the whole invisible and eternal world; more especially to death, the gate of eternity, and to the important consequences of death, -- heaven and hell!

21. This is the real nature of dissipation. And is it so harmless a thing as it is usually thought? It is one of the choicest instruments of destroying immortal spirits that was ever forged in the magazines of hell. It has been the means of plunging myriads of souls, that might have enjoyed the glory of God, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. It blots out all religion at one stroke, and levels man with the beasts that perish. All ye that fear God, flee from dissipation! Dread and abhor the very name of it! Labour to have God in all your thoughts, to have eternity ever in your eye! "Look" continually, "not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen." Let your hearts be fixed there, where "Christ sitteth at the right hand of God!" that whensoever he calleth you, "an entrance may be ministered unto you abundantly into his everlasting kingdom!" London, December 30, 1788

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