

HOW WE SEE

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Lesson: John 9

The Lord was up at Jerusalem for a great celebration at the Temple. One Sabbath, as He was teaching in the Temple, the Pharisee threatened to stone Him because He told them what faults they had to overcome if they wished to be saved. But the Lord was not afraid of them and passed right through their midst and went out of the gates. And there, at the gate, He found a poor beggar who had been blind from his birth. And the Lord's heart was full of pity.

The Disciples wanted to know why a man could be born blind. They thought of all misfortunes as punishments. They asked if it was that the parents of this man had sinned, and so were burdened with a blind child? Certainly, they thought, the man himself could not have done anything wrong before he was even born!

But the Lord showed them that evil things may happen to people, not as a punishment for what they have done, but accidentally. This man was no worse than others, nor were his parents. Yet, the Lord would never permit even accidents to happen, unless He could somehow make good come out of the disaster.

You children all know something about accidents. You know of fires that gut buildings. You have heard of the great floods, which have made thousands of families homeless. You have been told of ships wrecked at sea. You have perhaps had friends who have been crippled or been seriously ill. And, sooner or later, we will all die, which is usually thought of as the greatest misfortune of all. Yet you know that the Lord provides that something good should come out of all of these things. Take the case of people dying: the Lord permits this in order to give people the best of all His gifts—life among the angels of heaven.

And the poor blind beggar as we can see from the story could not have found the Lord and could not be saved except by walking all his life on the long road of darkness!

What a difficult thing it must be to be blind. To have to feel your way, to struggle to find the work you might prefer, to long to see the glory of the sun, the beauty of the stars, the colors of flowers, to be in the uncertainty of perpetual night!

The Lord, looking at the blind man, saw all this. And therefore He said, “The night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” And then He cured the blind man, not by any operation or expensive medicine, but simply by putting clay on his eyes and telling him to wash in the pool of Siloam.

Now there were many beggars around Jerusalem, and quite a few of them were blind. But to be *born* blind was very unusual, then as now. Yet what would you say if I told you that all of us are born blind!

Of course I do not mean that we are born with closed eyes, like a kitten or a baby mouse. We can actually see with our eyes when we are born. But there are different kinds of blindness. Our earthly eyes see the outsides, the surfaces of things, but they are blind to the inner things, which we therefore call “invisible” or “un-seeable.” Our earthly eyes can see only earthly things, and only those that are right around us.

Suppose that we are on a ship, looking out on the ocean. What can we see, except the surface? Underneath are unseen depths, with forests of water-plants and millions of water creatures. Or suppose we look at a treasure box. We see the wood and the hinges, but unseen within are jewels and pearls, gold ornaments and silver-clasps.

And so it is with babies. Despite their good eyes they may come into a church and see the walls and furnishings, yet not see any of the meaning of these things. The altar, the Word, the pictures in the glass windows—they are blind to those.

Small children are blind to the use of their stomachs and hearts, although they see the outside of their bodies! They hear what their parents tell them, but do not see that parents say things because they want to keep them safe. But gradually, as children grow older, they are cured from this blindness; they learn to see with their minds.

The more you know, the more you see. As long as you are ignorant, you are also blind. But the more you come to understand, the clearer you see—not only the outside of things, but the inside too. And then, when you look at the ocean, you can also see (with your imagination) all the kinds of things that are below the surface—things you have learned about. When you see a car, you think of all the things inside, the machinery. When you look at the stars and planets, you see the various laws (such as gravity), which they obey. With your mind you can see innumerable things that your eyes are blind to.

But no matter how much or how little you know about the mysteries of nature, you might still be blind to the most important things of all, unless you can see the truths about heaven. People who know nothing about the Lord and about

the spiritual world are meant in the Word where it speaks of those who are born blind. Because some people do not have the Word and the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, they remain blind to any truth about heaven until they come into the spiritual world after death. Then they can be cured and regain their sight.

But there were some very learned people in Jerusalem, who knew the Word, and yet they too were called 'blind' by the Lord. They were the Pharisees—the 'blind leaders of the blind.' They thought they saw very clearly, but they were so proud and had so much contempt for others that they were blind to their own faults. They would not listen to the Lord at all when He told them what they had to do to go to heaven. They were jealous of the Lord. And, although they heard about the Lord's curing the blind man, they would not believe. They were angry with the Lord and hated Him. And, as one of the apostles later said, "He who hates his brother is in darkness and does not know where he goes, because that darkness has blinded his eyes."

This is sometime true with us also; when we are angry with someone, we cannot see straight, cannot see how wrong we are. Evil spirits pull a veil over our minds so that we become blind. We shut our eyes against the truth and go on with our evil ways.

It is evil, naughtiness, pride, selfishness, and laziness that make people blind. If told that they are wrong, they get angry or sulky and will not admit that anyone else is right. It is very important, therefore, to try to listen to corrections openly. Remember the Pharisees. They would not have believed, even if an angel from heaven had come and told them the truth about themselves. They were blind, and the Lord told them that as long as they kept saying that they 'saw,' their sin would remain. They would not admit being wrong, even though the Lord Himself had come to save them!

We people on earth are born so blind that we cannot see the things of the spiritual world. That is the reason why the Lord came to open our eyes. That is why, in olden times, He opened the eyes of some people who were called prophets, to see little glimpses of the things that go on in heaven. And at last He prepared Emanuel Swedenborg and opened his spiritual eyes, so that he could live in both worlds and tell us in books about the marvelous things of heaven.

As you grow up, you children will also have your eyes—that is, your minds—opened to see what Swedenborg was shown. As you read the Heavenly Doctrine, you will come to see these marvelous things more and more clearly. You will come to realize that you are even now in the midst of spirits and angels, that heaven with all its beauty and delight is right around you. If you look deeply enough, your eyes will be opened to recognize what is right and what is wrong, what is of heaven and what is of hell. That is what is meant by

being wise. You will come to be led almost into a new world and will learn to walk in the light of heaven.

No person could give you this sight. Only those who have faith in the Lord can come to behold the secret things of heaven. If we have gained a faith in the Lord, faith that He alone can open our eyes and cure us of blindness, then we will do what the man born blind did: bow down before the Lord and worship.
Amen.