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Vision and Vocation

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The Importance and Value of God-given Vision

"Come hither, I will shew thee..." Rev. 21:9.

Once again in the course of its history the Church of God is found in a time of serious crisis as to its life and world-testimony. Not once, nor twice, has this occurred, but many times have conditions arisen which have raised the major questions as to its next phase or entire future. At such times there has always been one factor which has been decisive; that was, the presence or absence of God-given vision. Again and again, such vision has been, by its absence, the cause of calamity and disaster; or, by its presence, the turning point for good or ill, according to the attitude taken to it. God has many times reacted to either actual or threatening tragedy by the presentation of a new vision; new, so far as His people were concerned.

We are now entering more and more deeply into a situation which threatens the life and testimony of the Church, and already in large areas of the world it is an actual and desperate reality. It is no hypothetical or imaginary situation, nor one of supposition, but there is a terrific drive from the unseen with a view to the engulfing of all that is of God and of His Christ.

So the need of the hour is once again God-given vision. The value and importance of such vision is found in its various features. In the first place:

God-given Vision is Something Concrete with God

It is something which has existed with God in clear-cut definition in the eternal counsels from the beginning. It is not something abstract or nebulous, something that is what people term 'visionary' or mystical. It is quite definite, clear, and real in the mind and intention of God. God-given vision is not something subsequent to eventualities, an afterthought because of things having arisen unexpectedly; a kind of alternative to what God originally meant. It is not a substitute for His original plan. No, it is not an emergency expedient because of a situation unforeseen. God-given vision has its roots outside of time and circumstance, eventualities, contingencies, emergencies! All those things have been already taken account of, and have - so to speak - been swallowed up in the vision of God.

To be brought into such vision is to be brought on to a ground of confidence and assurance when the sands seem to be sinking and everything giving way. This, surely, is of no little importance and value. Then again:

God-given Vision Comprehends All Detail

Things, whether they be good or whether they be evil, are not ends in themselves. They are either embodied in or overcome by the vision. Under the sovereign government of the Spirit of God all things are made to serve that purpose which is the substance of God's vision. That is just the significance of the words so familiar and so often used about all things working together for good (Rom. 8:28). But we so rarely see them in their setting, and stop short of the full import. We just say "All things work together for good..." and stop there. The context has two aspects. Lives wholly under the Holy Spirit's government are in view, and "his purpose" is governing. Unless these two things are implicit, all things do *not* work together for good! Given that being "called according to his purpose" we in response are lovers of God, then all things are the sphere of a sovereignty which makes them work *together* for good. Purpose governs all, and the purpose is the substance of God-given vision. It therefore requires a vision of God's purpose in greater fulness, not in part. The purpose comprehends all parts. No phase or part is an end in itself. One wheel of a machine has no adequate meaning in itself. There lacks a real motive if all the other parts are not in view. We must not be too obsessed or taken up with the part or phase. If we are, the whole becomes bound up with that phase, for us, and we see no more. This may put us completely out of commission if any one phase has served its purpose and God is moving on. Sufficient motive demands sufficient vision, and we must see much more than that which is immediately before our eyes. Then, further still:

God-given Vision is Constantly Enlarging

It is very important to remember that God-given vision is never given in completeness any one time. This is something borne out by an abundance of Scriptural evidence and instances. Such vision is always subject to enlargement. It will always be developed and fulfilled through new phases. This is a law in nature, and nature embodies spiritual principles.

The means employed by God at one time may - and very likely will - pass or be changed. In the sovereign ordering of God one particular phase, method, or means will pass out, though greatly used and blessed so far. This does not involve a *change* of vision (unless it is ours and not God's) but an enlargement of vision. With God all that He uses and blesses, however wonderfully, is only relative and not final or ultimate. Therefore we must not cling to what has been and regard that as

the form for all time. So often this has been a most disastrous attitude of mind, and has resulted in God having to go on with His full purpose in other directions and by other means, and leave that fixed thing behind to serve a much lesser purpose than He wanted with it. Eventually it has *spiritually* died, although perhaps carried on by human effort and organization. It just lives on its past and tradition. We go on:

God-given Vision Always Moves Upward

In its first apprehension it seems to have such immediate, temporal, and earthly significance. The implications of any movement of God are not always recognized at the beginning, but if we go on with Him we shall find that much that is done here and is of time is - and has to be - left behind. The spiritual and the heavenly is pressing for a larger place and becoming absolutely imperative to the very life of the instrumentality and those concerned. It is spontaneous, and just happens. We wake up to realize that we have moved into a new realm or position, and no amount of additional earthly resource can meet the need. It is not only something more that is demanded, but something different. This is a crisis, and it will only be safely passed if there is vision of God's ultimate object. This demands spiritual mindedness, capacity for grasping *heavenly* things. One world may be tumbling to pieces, but the full and final is the explanation.

The great pity is that so many just will cling to the old framework or partial vision. God presents His *heavenly* pattern in greater fulness and demands adjustment. He does it with foreknowledge, knowing of a day which is imminent when this vision alone will save. But, because it is 'revolutionary' or not 'what has been in the blessing of God' etc., etc., it is rejected and put aside. Then the foreseen day comes and all sorts of expedients have to be resorted to to save the ship. Paul warned out of his intuitive vision that such would be the case on the journey to Rome, and it proved true, the ship eventually foundered and much was lost.

Abraham had a vision of "the city which hath foundations" and he "looked for" it, but never found it on earth. He found it at last in heaven, but it was the climax of a walk which was ever upward. Ezekiel saw "in the visions of God" the glory lifting from the earthly scene, and moving up and on; and this vision related to all his other visions, culminating in a spiritual house and river which have their counterpart alone in the revelation given to Paul and John particularly: heavenly, spiritual, universal. What a significant phrase that is about the house seen by Ezekiel - "there was an enlarging upward" (Ezek. 41:7). God-given vision is always "the *heavenly* vision", and always moves away from the merely temporal and sentient. If this were apprehended there would be much more vital fruit, and many fewer 'white elephants'.

God is never on the line of reduction, limitation. It may look like that, but it is not so. If we really had His vision, that which looks like trimming and reduction is His way of enlargement, but *spiritual* and *heavenly* enlargement.

It was "the God of *glory*" who appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2). It was the pattern in the *heavenlies* that was "shewn" to Moses (Heb. 8:5). It was "...above the firmament... a throne... and upon... the throne... a man above upon it" that Ezekiel saw. It was "that the *heavens* do rule" that Daniel apprehended. These are not only sovereign factors in government, but heavenly conceptions in the nature of things.

These two things proceed as one. God in sovereignty will run the risk of shattering, or allow the shattering, of so much that He has used of scaffolding or framework in order to realize the fuller purpose. It is not that it was wrong, but now He wants something more. We thank God for ever that He took Paul away from his travelling ministry and let him be shut up in prison. It was then that the full glorious vision and revelation of the "heavenlies" and the "eternal" was given to eclipse all the earthly and temporal. It was worth it, and was no tragedy! The Holy Spirit is the custodian of the *full* purpose of God, and under His government the Church and the individual believer will move ever on and up.

Satan may have had a lot to do with Paul's imprisonment, and with John's banishment to Patmos, but the Church has gained unspeakably in *heavenly* things.

Once again:

God-given Vision is the Ground of Our Training

When God does give vision it is that which becomes the occasion and basis of our testing, our education, and our discipline. This is far more important to God than easy fulfilment and realization; than that kind of facilitation which knows only sovereign power. Look at the prophets. They were men of vision. They stood in the gap between threatening disaster and the survival of God's people. But what discipline they knew because of their vision! It was their vision that brought all the inward as well as outward suffering upon them. Look again at Habakkuk. How he cries to God about the situation and then takes position in relation to the vision. But faith and patience are the great spiritual virtues and values to be perfected. "The just shall *live* by faith". Said John - with all his Patmos visions - "I John... your brother... in... the patience of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9).

So, things may be taking a new and different shape, but the purpose of God is the same. We may be presented with His vision in new and further-on aspects, but it is only what He originally meant.

Can we adjust? Can we leave "the things that are behind"? Without raising any questions as to the right or wrong of what has been, can we "go on" and "grow up", "attain"?

Finally:

God-given Vision Makes Men of Prayer

This is almost too obvious when we remember the men of the Bible. It was vision that got them away from the trivial and petty. It requires vision to get prayer on to the major lines and to make it real travail. What a bound and range those prophets had in prayer! But what immense issues were precipitated.

It is not *our* vision for God, but His vision in us that will be dynamic, and that will determine value.

I cannot conclude without pointing out that what could be voluntary with much gain has often to be made compulsory with much loss.

This is because we do not stand back from time to time and in detachment and waiting upon the Lord give Him an opportunity of enlarging vision.

Many a work which has mightily served the Lord and been a great spiritual testimony has lost its former glory, purity, and impact because it has become a 'Work', a 'Movement', an Organization, and its ramifications and responsibilities have become such as to completely rule out any such 'retreat' with God, where *that* work is put back and a real openness to the Lord for anything else, more or other, is enquired after.

The Lord might send prophetic vision by ministry to lead into His fuller meanings if there was a way for it, but *we are too busy*. What tragedy is related to such preoccupation!