

A GOOD KIND OF BLINDNESS

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Who is blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger whom I send?

Who is blind as he who is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? (*Isaiah* 42:19)

This passage from Isaiah is a prophecy concerning the Lord. Why is He called both blind and deaf? Why is this part of His perfection? Isn't blindness a defect, a limiting factor? The Lord has used these words to help us know an essential quality that He has and by His example recognize a quality that we can foster in our own lives. Obviously, there is a good kind of blindness, a kind that we should strive to have ourselves.

What is this good kind of blindness? Imagine a person with a terribly scarred face. She could be saddened and discouraged by the way these scars were a barrier between herself and others when she first met them. Children might be scared of her. People on the street might stare and whisper. She may sense that even people who know her avoid her because of the unpleasant appearance of her face. Imagine this woman sitting down on a bench already occupied by another person. That person starts a conversation. The woman senses no barrier or negative reaction in this person. It is refreshing to feel like she is truly being treated like a human being. As the other person gets up to leave, he opens a long white cane and the woman realizes why he did not react to her scars, he was blind. In this case his blindness was a benefit to him and to the woman with whom he talked. This would be a good quality of natural blindness, but, of course, natural blindness isn't what the Lord wants for all of us. Parallel to this natural blindness is a good kind of spiritual blindness that we should foster in our own lives.

In contrast to this last example imagine going out to dinner with someone who habitually criticizes everyone and everything around himself. As you enter the restaurant, he points to a place where the paint is flaking on the front of the building. He complains about the way you are seated and where. The format of the menu irritates him. His food isn't as good as some that he had at another restaurant. He points out various people in the restaurant commenting critically on their appearance, habits, or nationality. Would you be likely to enjoy this dinner? Not likely. By having all the things critically pointed out to you, it would be hard to have a good time. You might wish that your companion could not see these things and so wouldn't comment on them.

Being acutely aware of everything that is wrong or flawed in others is not necessarily a good quality. The teachings for the New Church describe a kind of blindness to faults and flaws that is a part of charity and a kind of seeing that is a quality of evil.

People with whom faith is separated from charity . . . see nothing else but errors and perversities residing with a person. But those who have faith that comes of charity are different. They notice the good qualities, and if they do see evil qualities and false ideas they excuse them, and, if possible, work with that person to correct them . . . [T]hose who have charity hardly notice the evil in others, but instead notice all the good things and true ideas that are theirs. On their evils and false ideas they place a good interpretation. Of such a nature are all angels, it being something they have from the Lord, who bends everything evil into good. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1079)

What is it like to have people judge us on our past failings? In Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, a woman who committed adultery was condemned to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her dress for the rest of her life. Every time anyone saw her, this red letter would be a reminder of her transgression. It would always be there. While we don't put physical badges on people because of what they have done, sometimes a person can worry that they will always be viewed as tainted by an event that happened long ago and that does not characterize their present life. Do you tend to see those past misdeeds before your eyes every time you see someone? If so, for you, they may as well be wearing a tattoo on their forehead as a symbol of their past errors. The Lord doesn't want us to be this way. He isn't this way. It isn't how He sees us. He would wish that we were blinder to such things.

Traditional Christianity has had a strain of thought that has emphasized being critical and judging. This destructive quality is an offshoot of a false view of God. For some people, God the Father is seen as condemning. They think that He looks at the human race and sees all as sinners who stand condemned before Him. In this false view it is only the sacrifice of His Son that saves us. But God doesn't look at us with critical eyes. He loves us. He is constantly helping each of us as much as we are possibly willing to receive in freedom. But for those who see Him differently, they can pride themselves on having the same view of others that they believe God has. They tend to be gloomy, angry people. They see evil everywhere and in all things. This isn't good.

People who have learned something of the New Church can have a similar failing. A man who joined the church as an adult by marrying into a family with a strong tendency to be critical, proudly told a minister that he was so glad to have joined the New Church because now he could see how bad most people really are. People have read the passages in the teachings for the New Church that do indeed say, that apart from the presence and influence of the Lord in our lives, we are nothing but evil and see the absence of the Lord as the reality. The passages that describe the dangers and failings of traditional Christian doctrine and the evil life it can support have been seen as a warning to mistrust people outside the New Church. A factual knowledge of these ideas that is separated from a heartfelt desire to serve others, to help them, is faith separated from charity. People who are in this state will be destructively judging and critical of all whom they meet.

People whose rational is such as consists in truth alone, even though this is the truth of faith, and does not at the same time consist in the good of charity, are altogether [like wild donkeys]. They are quick to find fault, makes no allowances, are against all, regards everyone as being in error, are instantly prepared to rebuke, to chasten, and to punish, show no pity, do not apply themselves and make no effort to redirect people's thinking; for they view everything from the standpoint of truth, and nothing from the standpoint of good. In short, they are hard people. The one thing to soften their hardness is the good of charity, for good is the soul of truth, and when good draws near and implants itself in truth the latter becomes so different that it can hardly be recognized. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1949)

In contrast to this wild donkey perspective, people who have charity motivating their thoughts might seem as though they were blind to much that others would focus on and find severely wanting. But this apparent blindness may be a very useful focus on other priorities.

But we also know that some qualities of spiritual blindness can be bad. There are three sources of a bad kind of spiritual blindness. One is the blindness of ignorance. A person can hurt himself and others by not knowing enough to recognize dangerous situations and bad choices. We don't want the blindness of ignorance. Another kind of blindness comes from an intense natural love for another person. A parent who blindly loves a daughter who is leading a destructive life can actually support her destruction of herself and her actions that harm others. We don't want the blindness that comes from a love of a person that doesn't wisely seek his or her long-term welfare. A third kind of blindness comes to people who are so involved in themselves and their own interests that they don't see the needs and concerns of the people around themselves. Such a person can be a husband who is so absorbed in reading mail or watching TV that he doesn't hear the desperation in his wife's voice as she speaks about a problem in their home, with the children or in their marriage. We don't want this kind of blindness either.

So what should we do if we sense that we tend to be too critical of others and the things around us. We can't immediately change our spontaneous inner response to what we see and hear. This response is directly produced by from what we love. It is a product of our will at that point. What we can do is reflect on the nature of this initial response. It is useful? Does it reflect the way the Lord Himself would view the situation? If we sense that our initial response is flawed, we should not express it in what we say or do. We should seek to keep it from continuing as a presence in our thoughts. But even this is not enough to bring about a change. If we sense a pattern of dangerous criticism, we need to recognize its source as the evil spirits seeking to direct our attention to their priorities. We need to acknowledge that there is a part of our natural heredity that allows them to do this. We need to acknowledge this evil to ourselves and before the Lord and ask Him to bring about a change in us.

If we do our part, gradually we will grow in our ability to be blind to certain things. This is a good kind of blindness. It is a kind of blindness that the angels have because it is a fundamental quality of the Lord. May we grow in our ability to see ourselves and others as the Lord see us. May we come ever more into the image of our Lord and God. AMEN

Lessons: *Isaiah 42:1-9, 14-20, Apocalypse Explained 409:2*

Isaiah 42

¹“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;

He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

²He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice*,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

³A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.

⁴He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

⁵Thus says God the LORD,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes
from it,

Who gives breath to the people on it,
And spirit to those who walk on it:

⁶“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
 And will hold Your hand;
 I will keep You and give You as a covenant to
 the people,
 As a light to the Gentiles,
⁷To open blind eyes,
 To bring out prisoners from the prison,
 Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.
⁸I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name;
 And My glory I will not give to another,
 Nor My praise to carved images.
⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass,
 And new things I declare;
 Before they spring forth I tell you of them.”
¹⁶I will bring the blind by a way they did not
 know;
 I will lead them in paths they have not known.

I will make darkness light before them,
 And crooked places straight.
 These things I will do for them,
 And not forsake them.
¹⁷They shall be turned back,
 They shall be greatly ashamed,
 Who trust in carved images,
 Who say to the molded images,
 ‘You *are* our gods.’
¹⁸“Hear, you deaf;
 And look, you blind, that you may see.
¹⁹Who *is* blind but My servant,
 Or deaf as My messenger *whom* I send?
 Who *is* blind as *he who is* perfect,
 And blind as the LORD’S servant?
²⁰Seeing many things, but you do not observe;
 Opening the ears, but he does not hear.”

In the Word "servant" means something that is of service and brings something into effect. This is plainly evident from the fact that the Lord in terms of His Divine Human is called "servant" and "minister," as in the following passage. In *Isaiah*:

Behold My servant, on whom I lean, My chosen, in whom My soul is well pleased; I have given My spirit upon Him. [He shall bring forth judgment to the nations]. Who is blind but My servant? or deaf as My angel that I send? Who is blind as He that is perfect, and blind as My servant? (*Isaiah* 42:1, 19).

... That it was by means of the Divine truth which belonged to Him that the Lord produced effects is meant by "I have given My spirit upon Him, He shall bring forth judgment to the nations;" "the spirit of Jehovah" meaning the Divine truth, and "to bring forth judgment to the nations" meaning to instruct. He is called "blind" and "deaf" because the Lord is as if He did not see and perceive the sins of people, for He leads people gently, bending and not breaking, thus leading away from evils things, and leading to good things; therefore He does not chastise and punish, like one who sees and perceives. This is meant by "who is blind but My servant? or deaf as My angel?" He is called "blind" and hence "a servant" from the Divine truth, and "deaf" and hence "an angel" from the Divine good; for "blindness" has reference to the understanding and thence to the perception, and "deafness" to the perception and thence to the will; it is therefore here means that He as it were does not see, although He possesses the Divine truth from which He understands all things, and that He does not will according to what He perceives, although He has the Divine good, from which He is able to effect all things. *Apocalypse Explained* 409:2