

Do We See Things So Differently From God?

God and mankind see things differently - not just a little different but completely different. But why is it this way?

Well, it has to do with the fact that we base pretty much everything on our experiences and perceptions. We judge people and events typically by what we see with our own eyes. For example, consider that famous parable of the religious Pharisee and the sinful tax collector going to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9-14). If we just look at them from a distance, we can immediately see two entirely different individuals. One is polished, and the other one is not. One is an upright citizen, and the other one is not. One prays, standing tall, fasting twice a day, and giving a tenth of all of his income, whereas the other one hangs his head low in the misery of his sins. One seems confident and secure, while the other one has a troubled conscience.

Now, according to our judgment, we see two completely different men. And according to all outward appearances, the Pharisee is the one who we would label as righteous, good, and true (the good guy), whereas the tax collector is not. Yes, according to our eyes, we would judge that the Pharisee has the upper hand - that he is more righteous and should be favoured before God and mankind.

But here is the catch, the Lord sees things not the way that we see things. God's way is not our way, and our way is not God's way.

So, with our example of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Lord actually sees the tax collector as justified. In other words, the Lord comes to the exact opposite conclusion from us. The Lord looks past all outward appearances and makes a judgment that just baffles us - He says that the sinful tax collector goes away from the temple justified, not the upright Pharisee.

Now, this is the way that it typically goes with Christianity. That is to say; things are never the way that they seem. It is almost as if mankind is blinded to the way that God sees things.

This is exactly what is happening in Christianity. Even though we can certainly see and make judgments about people and circumstances, we are more often than not blind to the reality of what God sees. All we have to do is look at our own lives to see how blind we truly are.

If we stop and take a long, hard look at our lives, what we typically see is one problem after another. Life has a way of carrying a long string of regrets. The human experience has shown us that humans sin in thought, word, and deed.

So, as a result of our sin, we either wallow in our sin, hanging our heads low in regret (like that tax collector), or we try to seize life and overcome our sins by doing lots and lots of good (like the Pharisee). We believe that we can offset our sin or at least cover it up by doing good things.

Whether we end up like that tax collector or that Pharisee, the result is the same - we are troubled by our sin and cannot truly escape it.

Indeed, it has been said before that our most significant need as people is to be justified - to feel right with ourselves and the world, to be and feel whole. But because of sin, we are thrown into a frenzy, and our lives are characterised by either being depressed from our sin or trying to overcome it through our own efforts.

Needless to say, the human condition is one where we are trapped in sin, dead in sin, and condemned in our sin. All of life is either being crushed by sin or trying to offset it. Nevertheless, the harsh reality is that no matter how hard we work and no matter how hard we scrub, this stain of sin remains. We cannot remove it from our lives and our sight.

This is how life is. This is how we see things in this life. And if this is not depressing enough, no matter where we look, we cannot find a solution to this problem of sin. As we look throughout history and upon our world with all of its resources and technological advances, our eyes cannot find a way out of this problem of sin.

Therefore, we must conclude and confirm what we see about ourselves and humanity - we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against God in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Yes, sin is what we see in ourselves. Sin is what we see in our world. We see sin leading to death, judgment, and a dead end.

Considering all of this, we must ask, "What does God see?"

He sees the same. God agrees with what we see about ourselves and this world. He accepts that we humans have made our lives into muck. But is this all that God sees? Is there anything else that God sees that we do not? Is there anything else that God sees that we are blinded to?

God not only sees this sinful condition that we find ourselves in, but He also sees Jesus - the Son of God. And in Jesus, God sees righteousness, which means that He sees you and me as righteous people, forgiven and clothed in the blood of the Lamb. Yes, even though we see ourselves damned in our sin, in Christ, God sees us as righteous - forgiven and redeemed.

So, on the one hand, we see our sin, and on the other hand, we hear from God's Word that He sees us as righteous because of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

What does this mean, though?

It means that we must be given eyes to see who we are from God's perspective. And these eyes are faith. Yes, faith. Faith is the key.

We live our lives in this valley of tears. We have this gruesome condition of sin that plagues us in this world, and, left to ourselves, we are blinded by sin with no hope, no solution, and no relief - just damnation and condemnation. However, when the Gospel comes to us, it announces to us that sinners are righteous in the eyes of God because of Jesus. And with this announcement, we are given faith. Yes, we are given faith that takes our eyes off of our sinful condition so that we might see Jesus and know that God calls and considers sinners righteous in spite of the fact that we are sinners and will continue to be sinners until the day we die. Yes, the Gospel opens our eyes so that we can see the fact that on account of Jesus, God sees us as righteous.

This is the greatness of faith! Faith gives us eyes to see. Faith snatches us away from looking at ourselves and places our eyes on Jesus so that we do not merely see things according to what is laid before us in this life in the valley of tears. Faith gives us eyes to see that in Christ, we have forgiveness, life, and salvation in spite of our sins.

And so, today, we can affirm that what we see in ourselves is true - we are indeed poor, miserable sinners in thought, word, and deed. However, by the Gospel, we can also confess that we see who we are from God's perspective... and that is justified sinners. Yes, justified and forgiven sinners by Christ, like the tax collector.

So when the devil and the world throw your sins in your face and declare that you deserve death and hell, say this, "I admit, and I can clearly see that I deserve death and hell, but what of it? For I know and can see One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall also be!" (Paraphrase of: Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College, 2003), 86-87.)

Faith gives us eyes to see. This the power of faith. By faith, we can call sin what it is - sin. And yet, we can know that sin and death and the devil do not have the final answer. Faith gives eyes to see, hear, and confess that God calls the sinner righteous in spite of the fact that he is a sinner.

Faith does not leave us blind but gives us eyes to see. Faith allows us to see that in sending His Son, there is no wrath between us and God. Faith allows us to see that God cannot be hostile to us. Faith allows us to see that God will not leave us condemned and damned in our sins but has shown us and given us Jesus. And Jesus is all that we shall ever need.