

Vision and the Christian Life

(Part 1)

Walking In The Light Of Reality

1 John 1:5-7 [NIV] *“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*

It is only when we walk in the light that we can see a true vision of life.

Let me illustrate this in a physical way.

I come home one dark night and in the dim house lights to my horror I see a long snake on the back lawn. My heart begins to pound wildly and adrenalin starts pumping into my bloodstream.

I grab the long-handled shears from the garden shed and carefully approach the snake and before it can attack me I cut off its head.

Satisfied it is dead, I go inside and settle my nerves with a drink. Later, lying in bed even with my eyes closed, I can still see the form of this snake on the lawn.

The next morning when it's light I return to the scene of my snake slaying. To my horror I find I have cut off the spray head of my garden hose that had been left on the back lawn after use.

It had always been a garden hose, but last night without clear vision, to me it was a deadly snake.

My fear, action and reaction followed from what I saw, the unclear vision I had the night before.

This is a physical illustration of how all our emotional and behavioural actions and reactions follow from our perceptions.

The snake drama was the result of ocular vision, but we also have an inner vision of reality that is highly personal and the unique way in which each of us perceives reality.

An old Roman philosopher, Epictetus, kept saying to people, *“it isn't your problems that are bothering you, it is the way you are looking at them.”* It didn't make him very popular.

For example: one thirsty person will look at a half filled glass of water and gleefully observe *“good, it is half full”*. Another thirsty person will look at the same glass of water and dejectedly moan *“oh, it's half empty.”*

Ultimately, all of our lives are shaped by our perceptions, by the way we look at things.

When we perceive again and again in much the same way, such repeated perceptions become a characteristic of our personality.

In our mind there are thousands of these attitudes to life that are lenses through which we perceive reality.

The important thing to realise is that our attitudes shape our reactions, emotional as well as behavioural.

Our perceived attitudes are capable of making the same experience either pleasant or painful.

We tend to think that everybody would react to a given situation just as we do, but this is not true. Our attitudes are always unique.

If I wish to mature, I have to confront the question “*how am I looking at this situation?*”

I then have the ability to change my attitude if I see it is detrimental to myself and others.

Philippians 4:11-13 [NIV] “*I am not saying this because I am in need, **for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.** I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*”

Paul had made a personal decision on how he would perceive every situation in his life.

But note he called on a strength other than his own to accomplish this.

We need a sign beside our bathroom mirror that reminds us “*you are looking at the face of the person who is responsible for your happiness today.*”

The good news is we can change our attitudes and consequently our lives.

Attitudes are no more than practised or habitual ways of perceiving some part of reality.

By changing the inner attitudes of our mind we can change all the outer aspects of our life.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

Again we see this profound and wise suggestion is linked to a relationship with our Creator God.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, **to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.**”*

Having accepted the sin cleansing blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ the only logical action to take is submission to Him and then be moulded into a being God will desire to have in His presence for eternity.

This moulding is the process of changed attitudes, new perceptions of reality through the lens of our mind being given new focus.

We can, with God’s help, break old and crippling habits of perception and cultivate new, life-giving habits.

Where do we start on this transforming process?

Mark 8:22-25 [NIV] “*They came to Bethsaida, and **some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.** He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*”

Do the same as the blind man’s friends did for him, approach Jesus Christ and request the veil of blindness is taken away and we can then clearly see first of all our own selves.

The sooner I acknowledge that my personal perception of the reality of my life makes my life a success or a failure, the better my life will begin to become.

Acknowledge full responsibility for our actions and reactions, we then start on the road to maturity and our ultimate destiny.

Resist the ever-present temptation to blame other people, to complain about the past and present circumstances of my life.

I must become “*the master of my fate*” and under God take full responsibility for my own happiness.

Another thing we need to resist is playing the crippling comparison game.

Comparing our looks, brains or accomplishments with those of others.

The comparison game is the sure way to a poor self-image.

The truth is I am the one and only me!

All people make mistakes in life, and the only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing.

Matthew 25:14-23 [NIV] *“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

Notice the one with two talents received the same reward as the one with five talents.

Matthew 25:24-27 [NIV] *“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’”*

To receive the same reward as the other two, this man had to increase by only one talent not five, not two.

I get the impression that the man with only one talent had made the mistake of comparing himself with the other two men with their five and two talents.

He felt alone and lonely most of the time.

He felt like the whole human race was holding a picnic and he had not been invited.

He saw himself as unattractive and unlovable, imprisoned by this self-perception.

The true perception is what makes a person attractive and lovable is being loving, truly caring about other people.

Philippians 2:4 [NIV] *“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

Responding to the needs of other people even more than our personal needs.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 [NIV] *“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”*

The bread of love for others always comes back on the waters of life.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 [NIV] *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.** That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**”*

As a Christian we must try to realise that God’s strength comes through our human weakness.

God’s Kingdom has historically been built on failures as well as successes.

For example, Jeremiah never really succeeded at anything and the poignancy of his repeated failures is deepened by the fact he didn’t want to be a prophet in the first place.

Jeremiah 15:10-11, 18 [NIV] *“Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me. The LORD said, “Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress.” ... “Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?”*

Somehow I think that Jeremiah, good and holy though he was, might have missed an important point. God can call us to what seems to be a hopeless task that was doomed to fail, yet God can build His own successes out of our failures.

Christians are called to do their reasonable best in any attempt and then leave the results to God.

1 Corinthians 3:6-8 [NIV] *“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, **but only God, who makes things grow.** The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.”*

God will make our faltering efforts grow.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta who gave her life to the destitute and derelict of India, was once asked, *“how do you measure the success of your work?”*

The saintly, aged woman looked puzzled for a while, and then responded, *“I don’t remember that the Lord ever spoke of success. He spoke only of faithfulness in loving. The Lord has called me to faithfulness in love. This is the only success that really counts.”*

We are worth only what we are worth in God’s eyes, no more, no less.

We cannot change others, the world about us, or the weather, but we can change ourselves.

Each of us stands at the fork of a road in life.

I can take the road of assigning responsibility of my reactions to others, but that is a dead-end road leading only to the death of my growth and development as a Christian, the death of what I might have been.

Or I can choose the road marked “*what’s in me*” that governs my perception of reality.

Such a road will be bumpy with sharp turns, mountains to climb and rivers to cross.

But eventually I will become a brand-new being with a completely new perception of life.

I will become more like Jesus Christ and experience the life He has promised as His gift and legacy to believers.

John 10:10 [NIV] “... *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*”

Let us now study and adopt these new Christ-like perceptions that will re-make our lives.