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SESSION 3 | Self-Control and the Eyes

I. INTRODUCTION

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,” (Titus 2:11–12).

Self-control is governing your mind, will, and emotions in obedience to God’s word by the power of the Spirit.

“Be careful little eyes what you see...”

The area of self-control over our eyes is broader, more deadly serious, and more full of glory than we think.

II. HOW SCRIPTURE SEES THE EYES

A. Scripture recognizes the close connection between what we see and what we think.

1. Scripture speaks of the eyes literally, but it also uses the eyes as an analogy for thought. Often, it is difficult to tell the difference.

2 Chron. 20:12; Job 42:5; Ps. 25:15, 119:15, 119:37; Prov. 4:25, 17:24; Ez. 6:9, 8:6, 8:12, 20:7-8; Matt. 12:38-42, 13:10-17, 16:1-4, 23:1-39; John 4:35, 9:35-40; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 1:18.

2. This is not surprising, because whatever our eyes see becomes something our minds think about. The *literal eye* – what we see – has a significant influence over the *mental eye* – what we think about.

B. Vision is a gift and has great potential for good.

1. Vision is spoken of positively before and after the Fall, and continuing into the New Heavens and New Earth. It provides both practical help and enjoyment.

Gen. 1:9, 1:25, 9:12-17, 21:19, 29:17; Ex. 13:21, 14:30, 28:2; Josh. 4:19-24; I Sam. 16:12; Ps. 8:3-4, 65:8; Prov. 23:26; Eccl. 11:7; Song of

Solomon; Isa. 40:26; Matt. 2:1-10; Rom. 15:4; Phil. 2:28; I Thess. 2:17, 3:6, 3:10; 2 Tim. 1:4; 3 John 14.

2. Jesus restores the gift of vision to the blind.

Isa. 29:18, 42:7; Matt. 9:27-31, 11:2-6, 12:22-23, 15:30-31, 20:29-34, 21:14; Mark 8:22-26, 10:46-52, Luke 4:16-21 7:18-23, Luke 18:35-43; John 9:1-40.

3. Ultimately, Scripture speaks of seeing God Himself.

Ex. 33:17-34:9; Ps. 17:15; Ps. 27:4; Isa. 6:5-7, 30:20; John 1:14-18; Matt. 5:8; I John 3:2; Rev. 22:4.

C. Vision has great potential for harm.

1. We can see things that are evil in themselves as well as good things that tempt us to evil.

Gen. 3:6, 6:2; Lev. 18; Josh. 7:20-21; 2 Sam. 11:2-5; Job 31:1; Ps. 119:37; Prov. 25:20; Isa. 13:16, 33:15; Matt. 4:8-10; 2 Pet. 2:14; I John 2:16.

2. We can see things that are misleading. Our eyes do not always tell us the truth, and they never tell us the whole truth.

I Sam. 16:6-7; 2 Kings 6:15-17; Isa. 11:3; I Peter 1:8-9.

3. We can idolize what we see. This happens any time we invest what we see with an authority or a value that should be reserved for God alone.

Ex. 20:4-6; Ex. 32; Num. 13:25-33; Deut. 4:19; Isa. 44:9-20; John 20:24-31.

D. Whether for good or evil, vision is powerful.

Matt. 6:22-23: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Vision has the power to awaken our desires, influence our thoughts and emotions, and move us almost immediately to action.

Numbers 15:39; Josh. 7:20-21; 2 Sam. 11:1-5; Job 31:7; Prov. 27:20;
Eccl. 2:10; Song of Solomon 4:9; I John 2:16.

III. SELF-CONTROL AND THE EYES

A. Self-control begins with right thinking.

B. Self-control is active, not passive.

Think of a good driver.

Scripture warns us of the tragic consequences of failing to actively control our eyes, and it calls us to an intense, Spirit-empowered proactivity in all of life.

1 Tim. 6:11–12: But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Gen. 9:20-27; Josh. 7:20-21; 2 Samuel 11:1-2; Isa. 3:16; Matt. 5:27-30, 18:7-9; Mark 9:42-50; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Gal. 5:16, 22-23; Eph. 4:17-24, 5:15-16; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 12:1-2; I Pet. 1:13

C. A definition of self-control over the eyes:

Self-control over the eyes means governing our gift of sight for the best possible good, by the power of the Spirit, to the glory of God. This includes seeking to guard our eyes from that which is harmful, seeking to direct our eyes to that which is best, and processing whatever we see in a manner pleasing to God.

IV. LEARNING SELF-CONTROL OVER THE EYES

A. Areas of potential harm

1. Sexual immorality
2. Greed, Materialism
3. False joy
4. Jealousy, Envy, Comparison, Discontent
5. Fear and Anxiety
6. Pride and Boasting

7. Depression, Darkness
8. Violence
9. Anger
10. Crudeness, Filthiness
11. Rampant wickedness, Lack of self-control

B. Areas to look for the “best”

1. Fruits of the Spirit – what can you see that will help you cultivate these things?
2. Opportunities to serve outside and inside the Church.
3. God’s Word
4. Food
5. Media
6. Nature
7. Man reflecting God’s image

“Clearly human beings have a strange malady that makes the ordinary glories of each day almost invisible, and certainly less interesting than their imitations in theaters and television. There are more ooooh’s and ahhh’s over the visual effects on a thirty-foot theater screen than over the night sky and the setting sun. Why is it so hard for us to feel wonder at the usual when clearly it is more spectacular than the man-made imitation? ... [S]ince our redemption has already begun in this age, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians ought to have better eyes than people in general for seeing the wonders that day and night pour forth. **We ought to be the kind of people who walk out of the house in the morning with the same sense of expectancy that we take into the theater – only more.**” – John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God*, 195.

C. “Calling in better strength than our own”

“Men may talk of self-control, as if the reins were in his own hand. But he who has been born of the Spirit, and taught ‘to know the plague of his own heart,’ is made to feel that effective self-control is divine grace and not his own native power. . . **Have not repeated defeats taught us the need of calling in better strength than our own?**” – Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, 483-484

1. **Practicing dependence on the Lord: Spiritual disciplines**
2. **Practicing dependence on the people of the Lord**
3. **Cultivating a heart of humility**

John 15:5-8; James 4:6

D. “Preparing your mind for action...”

Self-control is not just a matter of reacting well in the moment. The battle of self-control is often won or lost before you even get to the battlefield.

1. Know your enemy (without and within)

- a. What are your tendencies?
- b. What are the Enemy’s strategies? “It’s not as bad as...” “You deserve...” “It’s too late...”

2. Anticipate the trouble spots

3. Cultivate “a new affection”¹

Ps. 119:6, 15, 18, 37, 82, 123, 148

E. Going on the offensive

1. Be active

2. Prepare a better view, and start looking at it.

3. Be violent

Matthew 5:27–30: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

Matthew 18:7-9; Mark 9:42-50.

We are called to this level of violence at all times. But there may be times when this attitude means adopting unusually strong measures.

¹ Thomas Chalmers, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.”

F. Wielding the Gospel

- 1. Promises now**
- 2. Promises for the future.**

Colossians 1:13 “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 3:1–4: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Titus 2:11–14: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”