

Do You See?

by David Powlison

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.¹*

Do you see? Is your earth *crammed* with heaven, and does every common bush blaze with glory? Do you take off your shoes on holy ground? Or do you pluck berries, idle and ignorant?

Do you see that He sees? "For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths."² Do you live life utterly in public? Are you aware that everything you do and think is observed, then, figuratively, written in a book? Do you know that you will render account for every word out of your mouth? Are you aware that the video camera records you? Is your walk through life *crammed* with the sovereign God's watchful presence?

Do you see that He is at work? "God works all things for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose."³ "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator."⁴ Do you see every event, every circumstance, every hardship, every frustration, every pain, every joy as part of the providence of the sovereign, loving God? Do you trust and obey your God or do you grumble and scheme? Are your circumstances *crammed* with God and His purpose to make you like Jesus?

Do you see that He talks to you? "I have seen a limit to all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."⁵ What do you see when you look at

your Bible? Do you see a book *crammed* with relevance? Do you see a book out of which God bursts as He speaks to what matters in daily life? Is your Bible packed with application to the real problems of real people in the real world: inexhaustible, immediate, diverse, flexible? Or is the Bible relatively thin when it comes to addressing human struggles?

I see two sorts of contemporary Bible-believing, evangelical Protestants. One sort has a Bible crammed with relevance to human life. The other sort has a Bible of modest utility. This difference in seeing underlies many of the conflicts and misunderstandings within Christian counseling.

Let me first discuss those Bible-believers whose Bible is only a moderately useful resource. They may honor the Bible with noble-sounding descriptions. God's Word provides a framework of ultimate meaning. It is a "resource" for comfort in trials or for "spiritual" strengthening. Scripture maps out the way of ultimate salvation. It is useful for "theology," for theoretical truths about God, heaven and hell, life and death, the kingdom, "the Christian view of...." It is an honored authority for reflecting on the "large" questions of life.

What is wrong with that paragraph? On the surface, nothing, except that all is rather vague and high-flying. Even theological liberals have uttered similar sentiments. The divide comes when you ask whether the Bible is truly useful in the trenches of daily life. Here this sort of Bible-believer turns to other sources for insight and guidance. Some turn to new and personalized revelations, prophecies, leadings and intuitions. Others turn to the secular psychologies for understanding and guidance. In either case, the Bible doesn't say *enough* about what really matters in daily life.

Think of it this way. People with a relatively thin Bible have a vision defect. Their Bible is seen as a child's eight-key, tin toy piano. Those eight white keys may be of

¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh," Book VII.

² Proverbs 5:21.

³ Romans 8:28.

⁴ I Peter 4:19.

⁵ Psalm 119:96,105.

central importance in music theory: the key of C-major, beginning with middle-C, sounds the basic do-re-mi after all. They'll do for the Sunday School songs. But you can't play much of depth and interest. No sonatas. No fugues. No concertos. You can't sound the nuances, the variations, the minor keys of life. And no mature pianist would bother plunking around on an eight-key tin piano. There are more interesting and flexible instruments around.

But for the other sort of Bible-believer the Bible is a grand piano. In fact it's a grand piano, plus the rest of the orchestra, plus the great composers, plus the great pianists, plus the great conductors. It sounds all the notes, all the tones, all the rhythms, all the keys, all the special effects, all the nuances. That's the vision biblical counselors have of the Bible. It's *crammed*. The Composer, Conductor and Musician is active.

When people with thin Bibles hear people with crammed Bibles talk about the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling, they *hear*, "Something thin and incomplete is sufficient for a very complex job." That sounds ridiculous. Biblical counseling sounds absurd, doctrinaire, obscurantist, the rantings of small-minded know-nothings who glory in their ignorance.

But when people with crammed Bibles speak of Scripture's sufficiency they *mean*—or ought to mean—"Something living and active, inexhaustibly rich, comprehensive and relevant, is sufficient for a very complex job." That sounds reasonable. And when in the trenches of face-to-face ministry the Lord Himself speaks to people, that profession of vision is vindicated.

Vision defects aren't the only sort of defect, of course. There are also skill defects. We biblical counselors, as individuals and even as a movement, don't always do the best job of playing the music. We all have skill defects. Someone who sees the grand piano—no vision defect—may only know how to play "Chopsticks." A novice on a violin squawks; a novice on a trumpet blasts; on the drums he thumps monotonously. Such failings may make it hard for bystanders to catch the vision, but they do not invalidate the vision. There is a full orchestra; let's grow up out of our failings and learn how to play.

Skill defects are easier to overcome than vision defects, but God will overcome both to the praise of His glory. Is your Bible crammed but your skills limited? A seeing child may stumble at first, but eventually he or she will run and skip under the Father's care. Or is your Bible relatively thin? A blind child can never even walk without halting. But the Father can open eyes too.

In this issue of *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* I hope we can give you at least glimpses of orchestral wisdom. Paul Tripp's "The Use of Homework in Biblical Coun-

seling Part 2" walks you through how to extend the counseling session into the entire week. Effective homework helps establish people on a path of lifelong growth in godliness. Feel free to copy and hand out Tripp's homework assignments.

"Helping Anorexics" by Elyse Fitzpatrick is the third in her series on eating problems. Eating problems, like other life-dominating problems, make crystal clear the conflict in the human heart between the reign of darkness and the reign of light.

My article, "Critiquing Modern Integrationists," describes the counseling environment in the contemporary evangelical church. The interaction of believers with psychology—and with newspapers, novels, counselees, and their own experience—poses a perennial question that must be answered carefully. How do you reinterpret observations and explanations of human life that are simultaneously insidious and insightful?

On the preaching front we have combined a sermon by Joel Nederhood, "Good News for the Sick," with a brief article by Jay Adams on how to adapt your message to particular audiences. The lessons preachers can learn are equally applicable to counselors who seek to reach an audience of one or two. A homework assignment appended to Nederhood's sermon helps readers of the sermon wrestle out God's purposes in illness and disability. Hand out the sermon and assignment.

This issue of the *Journal* contains two book reviews. Bill Smith reviews *Power Religion*, edited by Michael Horton. Ed Welch reviews *Three Compulsions that Defeat Most Men* by Vincent Gallagher.

Lastly, Jay Adams and I have collaborated on "How to Write for Publication." We believe that some of our readers will also become our writers. Have you seen? Can you help others see? If the God Who sets the bush aflame and Who speaks His Word to the details of life has given you wise things to write, go to it.