Beholding

by T. Austin-Sparks


"I beheld the Lord always before my face" (Acts 2:25).

The last part of that quotation could rightly define the nature and object of the ministry of this little paper.

Not to propagate a teaching as such; not to constitute a new community; not to support a particular 'movement'; but truly and solely to bring and keep the Lord Jesus in view in ever-growing fullness: that is its object. It seeks to be occupied with the far-reaching purpose of God concerning His Son, Jesus our Lord.

In this connection, and according to the above quotation from David, it is impressive and instructive to note what a great influence on life the matter of seeing, or beholding, has.

It can be truly said that a great deal of what we are, and therefore of the effect that we have in this world, is the result of our seeing. There is much truth in the saying that we become like that upon which our eyes are mainly focused. This can be seen in national characteristics. The arid, austere, hard, cold, and colourless regions of the world produce a hard, austere and matter-of-fact type of people. The colourful, verdant, soft, warm and fertile realms, where nature has not to be coerced but only guided, produce colourful and easy-going people with more artistic and sentimental natures. Small and restricted surroundings produce small minds, with limited interests and understanding. The dwellers in the spheres of far distances and massive dimensions are venturesome, bold, and generous, with enterprise almost audacious. This is a general rule with occasional and particular modifications or variations. It points to the effect on an individual or a community, consciously or unconsciously, of that which is continually before their eyes.
The Bible takes much account of this fact and carries it over to all its parallels in the spiritual life. Indeed, it puts every stage and phase of the Christian life upon the basis of seeing.

The initiation or beginning of the Christian life is the result of 'beholding the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

There were various objects of sacrifice in the great typological system in Israel, but the lamb was the centre of all. Their history as a nation began with the Passover lamb. They were ever and always reminded of that beginning by the yearly Passover. They looked upon the lamb as bearing their sin and judgment, although itself 'without spot or blemish', and knew that it was God's lamb pointed out and provided for them to look upon.

The New Testament brings the Lamb of God into view and calls for beholding. That word means more than 'take a look', 'glance your eyes toward Him'. It means, 'fasten your gaze upon Him'. It is the gaze of need, of a quest; of desperation, if you will.

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45:22).

Then the Bible places upon the same basis the whole matter of our progressive transformation.

'Beholding... we are changed into the same image' (2 Cor. 3:18).

It is not an effort to form some mental picture of Jesus. In the Apostolic writings He is presented to us, and for us, from various vital standpoints, by the One who knows Him best and most fully.

In 'Romans', for instance, He is comprehensively presented as the essential righteousness of God provided where none can be found otherwise, but without which there is no hope at all for man or creation.

This is not an introduction to the books of the New Testament, but a pointer to Him and an indication as to how, as we are found looking at

*Him* - not at the writers - an influence upon our character toward His likeness will follow.

What is true in principle regarding the beginning and the progress of the Christian life is also shown to be related to its consummation.

"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him;

*for we shall see him even as he is*" (1 John 3:2).

There is more that shows that that final 'beholding' will have a consummating effect in putting the final touches to the work of 'conforming to His image'. So, from first to last, our salvation, transformation, and glorification are vitally related to our eyes, our spiritual seeing. 'The pure in heart shall see God' (Matt.5:8).

But, when I set out to pen these lines, I had other things also in mind. Our eyes are so much confronted with conditions that are contrary to Christ, and this constitutes such a battle-ground for our eyes.
The Bible contains much that shows the deplorable results of the wrong use of the eyes. Think of Eve, of David, of the ten spies at Kadesh-barnea, of Samson (who saw a woman to his spiritual undoing, and eventually lost his physical eyes), and so on.

May it not be that much of that which is to be deplored in evangelical Christianity is due to this wrong use of the eyes? Our religious book-shops are furnished with the sour and bitter fruits of time and energy spent searching out and 'exposing' the weaknesses, flaws, or faults of so much that is otherwise of true value. This can become a predisposition, an obsession, a mania, and a menace.

We look at men, at people. We look at ministries. We look at Christian work, and in all we mark the human and faulty aspects. These become our foci, and the result is that the really valuable, and - perhaps - much fuller value, is eclipsed for us by the spot that has become everything to us.

Nothing has escaped this blighting use of the eyes, even that which has been most of God. We have known greatly used servants of God having their ministry cut off from thousands of believers just because of the focusing upon a deviation - or imagined deviation - in some comparatively small point, from common acceptance. The decline of ministry in some of our great conventions can be traced to this very thing. None would be more jealous for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, than we are, but we are equally jealous that the standard of judgment should be - not tradition, or rigid systems of men, but - the measure of Christ.

Christ is the criterion, from first to last; not the judgments of men. Do I - or rather can I - see the Lord, if I am really looking for Him? If so, that must be my focal point. If He is there, there is hope for the rest, and I must leave that with Him.

How easy it is to sing glibly: 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus', and forget that it is always from 'the things of earth'.

"I beheld the Lord always before my face."

For the sake of everything precious to Him, may this be true of us!