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## The Importance and Value of God-given Vision

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*First published in "Toward The Mark" magazine, May-Jun 1978, Vol. 7-3. Edited by Harry Foster.*

"Come hither, I will show thee..." (Revelation 21:9)

At times of crisis in the Church's history there has always been one factor which has been decisive; that is, the presence or absence of God-given vision. Again and again, such vision has been, by its absence, the cause of calamity and disaster; or, by its presence, the turning point for good or ill, according to the attitude taken to it. God has many times reacted to either actual or threatening tragedy by the presentation of a new vision: new, so far as His people were concerned.

The need and importance of such vision is found in its various features. In the first place:

### **It is Concrete with God**

Such vision is something which has existed with God in clear-cut definition in the eternal counsels from the beginning. It is not something abstract or nebulous, something that is what people term 'visionary' or mystical. It is quite definite, clear and real in the mind and intention of God. God-given vision is not something subsequent to eventualities, an afterthought because of things having arisen unexpectedly; a kind of alternative to what God originally meant. It is not a substitute for His original plan. It is not an emergency expedient because of a situation unforeseen. God-given vision has its roots outside of time and circumstance, eventualities, contingencies or emergencies. All those things have been already taken account of, and have - so to speak - been swallowed up in the vision of God.

To be brought into such vision is to be brought on to a ground of confidence and assurance when

the sands seem to be sinking and everything giving way. This, surely, is of no little importance and value. Then again:

### **It is Comprehensive**

Things, whether they be good or whether they be evil, are not ends in themselves. They are either embodied in or overcome by the vision. Under the sovereign government of the Spirit of God all things are made to serve that purpose which is the substance of God's vision. That is just the significance of the words so familiar and so often used about all things working together for good (Romans 8:28). We so rarely see them in their setting, and stop short of the full import. We just say: "All things work together for good..." and stop there. The context has two aspects. Lives wholly under the Holy Spirit's government are in view, and "His purpose" is governing. Unless these two things are implicit, all things do *not* work together for good! Given that being "called to his purpose" we, in response, are lovers of God, then all things are the sphere of His sovereignty which makes them work together for good. Purpose governs all, and the purpose is the substance of God-given vision. It therefore requires a vision of God's purpose in greater fullness, not in part. The purpose comprehends all parts. No phase or part is an end in itself. One wheel of a machine has no adequate meaning in itself. There lacks a real motive if all the other parts are not in view. We must not be too obsessed or taken up with the part or the phase. If we are, the whole becomes bound up with that phase so far as we are concerned, and we see no more. This may put us completely out of commission if any one phase has served God's purpose and He is now moving on. Sufficient motive demands sufficient vision, and we must see much more than that which is immediately before our eyes. Then, further still:

### **It is Constantly Enlarging**

It is very important to remember that God-given vision is never given in completeness at any one time. This is something borne out by an abundance of Scriptural evidence and instances. Such vision is always subject to enlargement. It will always be developed and fulfilled through new phases. This is a law in nature, and nature embodies spiritual principles.

The means employed by God at one time may - and very likely will - pass or be changed. In the sovereign order of God one particular phase, method or means will pass out, though greatly used and blessed so far. This does not involve a *change* of vision (unless it is ours and not God's) but an enlargement of vision. With God all that He uses and blesses, however wonderfully, is only relative and not final or ultimate. Therefore we must not cling to what has been, and regard that as the form for all time. So often this has been a most disastrous attitude of mind, and has resulted in God having to go on with His full purpose in other directions and by other means, and leave that fixed thing behind to serve a much lesser purpose than He wanted with it. Eventually it has *spiritually* died, although perhaps carried on by human effort and organisation. It just lives on its past and tradition. Further:

### **It Always Moves Upward**

In its first apprehension it seems to have such immediate, temporal and earthly significance. The implications of any movement of God are not always recognised at the beginning, but if we go on with Him we shall find that much that is done here and is of time is, and has to be, left behind. The spiritual and the heavenly is pressing for a larger place and becoming absolutely imperative to the very life of the instrumentality and those concerned. It is spontaneous, and just happens. We wake up to realise that we have moved into a new realm or position, and no amount of additional earthly

resource can meet the need. It is not only something *more* that is demanded, but something different. This is a crisis, and it will only be safely passed if there is vision of God's ultimate object. This demands spiritual mindedness, capacity for grasping heavenly things. Our world may be tumbling to pieces, but the full and final outcome is what matters. The great pity is that so many just cling to the old framework or partial vision. God presents His heavenly pattern in greater fullness and demands adjustment. He does this with foreknowledge, knowing of a day which is imminent when this vision alone will save. But because it seems revolutionary or unlike what God has blessed in the past, it is rejected and put aside. Then the foreseen day comes and all sorts of expedients have to be resorted to in an attempt to preserve any values for God.

Abraham had a vision of "the city which hath foundations" and he looked for it, but he never found it on earth. He found it at last in heaven, but only as the climax of a walk which was ever upward. Ezekiel was another man of vision. In his "visions of God" he saw the glory lifting from the earthly scene and moving up and on, finally culminating in a spiritual house and river which find their counterpart in the final revelation given to John. It was heavenly, spiritual, universal. What a significant phrase that is about the house seen by Ezekiel - "there was an enlargement upward" (Ezekiel 41:7). God-given vision is always heavenly and always moves away from the merely temporal and earthly. To understand this is to be found in ways of vital fruitfulness.

God never works for reduction or limitation, even though at times He may seem to be doing so. When we are able to see as He sees we find that what looks like trimming and reduction is really His way of leading to more spiritual and heavenly enlargement. It was "the God of glory" who appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2). It was "the pattern in the heavenlies" that was shown to Moses (Hebrews 8:5). It was "... above the firmament... a throne... and upon the throne... a man above upon it" that Ezekiel saw (Ezekiel 1:26). It was that "the heavens do rule" that Daniel apprehended (Daniel 4:26). These are not only sovereign factors in government, but heavenly conceptions in the nature of things.

These two things proceed as one. God in sovereignty will run the risk of shattering, or allowing the shattering of much that He has used of scaffolding or framework, in order to realise His fuller purpose. It is not that what went before was wrong, but only that He now desires something more. We thank God that ever He took Paul away from his ministry of travelling evangelism and let him be shut up in prison, for it was then that the full glorious vision and revelation of the "heavenlies" and the "eternal" was given. This seemed to eclipse all the earthly and temporal. It was worth it. What might have seemed a tragedy was not one after all. Satan may have had a lot to do with Paul's imprisonment and with John's banishment to Patmos, but from these troubles the Church has gained very much in heavenly values. The Holy Spirit is the custodian of the full purpose of God and under His government the Church and the individual believer will move ever on and up. Once again:

### **It is the Ground of our Training**

When God does give vision it is that which becomes the occasion and basis of our testing, our education and our discipline. This is far more important to God than easy fulfilment and realisation; than that kind of facilitation which is made possible by God's overruling. Look at the prophets! They were men of vision. They stood in the gap between threatening disaster and the survival of God's people. But what discipline they endured because of their vision! It was their vision which brought all the inward as well as the outward suffering upon them. Look again at Habakkuk. How he cried to God about the situation and then took his position in relation to the vision. It is faith and patience which are the virtues to be perfected, so he realised that "the just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Similarly John, the man of the Patmos visions, described himself as the brother "in... the patience of Jesus" (Revelation 1:9).

So we may find that although things may be taking a new and different shape, the purpose of God has not changed. We may be presented with His vision in new and more advanced aspects, but it is only what God originally purposed. Can we adjust? Can we leave the things that are behind? Without raising questions as to the right or wrong of what has been in the past, can we go on and grow up as we move towards God's end? Finally:

### **It Makes Men of Prayer**

This is almost too obvious when we remember the men of the Bible. It was vision which got them away from the trivial and petty. It required vision to get prayer on to the major lines and to make it a matter of real travail. What a bound and range those prophets had in prayer! But what immense issues were precipitated. It is not our vision for God, but His vision in us that will be dynamic, and that will determine lasting values.

I cannot conclude without pointing out that what could have been voluntary with a minimum of loss has often had to be made compulsory with gains that are less than they could have been. This is because we do not from time to time stand back and in detachment wait upon God so that He can adjust and enlarge our vision. Many a work which has mightily served the Lord and been a great spiritual testimony has lost much of its glory and impact by becoming an organised routine which has made no provision for the further light from God which could have come from periods of retreat and waiting upon Him. Perhaps the Lord would send more prophetic vision which would lead into fuller spiritual values *if we were not too busy* to receive it. Without renewed vision there can so easily be a leakage of spiritual power.