

From This Perspective

5/21/17

Ephesians 4:22-23

²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

I have always been interested in the effects of perspective. I didn't know what it was called when I was a kid, but I loved when driving in a car a series of perpendicular power poles sort of lined up for just an instance. The poles the most distant would seem to stay in place and the closer ones sort of came together in just the right timing until - for just a flash – there was just one pole. Then they would gradually all spread out again as we drove by.

I am not a painter nor do I draw, so I know nothing about perspective, but I do remember being in grade school and learning about something called a 'vanishing point'. So when you sketch a picture, you use this vanishing point as a reference to how lines are drawn so that things look correct and natural.

When I am out walking I become aware of this vanishing point. I look at a distant point and all the telephone poles seemed to converge on this far off spot; all the streets seemed to move closer together toward this point in the distance.

This is called perspective. I understand that this seems remedial and obvious, but my awareness of this startles me.

When my attention is drawn to it I notice that buildings, although I know are perfectly rectangular, looked trapezoidal. Circles were flattened into ellipses. This, I have learned, is called ‘foreshortening’.

Now this is simple-minded, I realize. But sometimes we go through our lives not recognizing the apparent obviousness of what surrounds us. We take for granted that things look smaller in the distance and parallel line inexorably converge into points on the horizon.

Sometimes we are unaware of the perspective that surrounds us, and the perspective that is within us. Another word for perspective is attitude, as our Bible verse uses. It could just have easily been interpreted, “...to be made new in the perspective of your minds...”

Perspective means many different things depending upon the context. When it refers to life, perspective refers to the reference point from which we categorize, measure, and judge experiences. Our perspective dictates our belief system. Simply put, it is how we see things; it is our point of view.

And what I notice from walking is that my perspective is chiefly a result of my focal point; because when I change my focal point, the lines all started converging onto another point – my perspective had changed.

Anaïs Nin said about perspective, “We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.” This is what I wanted to speak

about today, how our perspective on things can change by changing our focus and growing in knowledge and awareness of God.

Since I don't see things as they are but see things as I am, someone can determine my perspective by taking note of my behavior, my rationality, how I treat others, how I speak to others. Someone can observe my voting record, what I eat, whether I recycle or not; where I shop, what I buy online, and the list goes on and on. All of this reveals my perspective from an empirical, measurable, and observable reference point. Companies pay significant amounts of money to gain information so they can advertise items that they have determined would be enticing from my perspective.

We draw people to us or repel them with our perspective. We tend to associate with people who share our same perspective, who believe the way we do, who share our attitudes toward people, institutions, and circumstances.

Many of us naively or erroneously believe that everyone is like us, and are often surprised or horrified when we find someone who holds a differing opinion or demeanor. As James Allen said, "The suspicious believe everybody to be suspicious; the liar feels secure in the thought that he is not so foolish as to believe that there is such a phenomenon as a strictly truthful person; the envious see envy in every soul; the miser thinks everybody is eager to get his money;...and the abandoned sensualist looks upon the saint as a hypocrite."

If our perspective is narrow, then we have limited social and interpersonal techniques at our disposal. If our perspective is too self-centered, we may be unable or unwilling to demonstrate with our words or actions that we approve of others, or accept and appreciate others.

Our perspective determines how we face challenges. Some people refuse to accept help. “I don’t need help; I can do this myself. It just takes more effort, more power, and more determination.” If this is our attitude – our perspective toward challenge – then we may alienate those around us.

“If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.” ~Abraham Maslow

Our perspective as a nation can be critical when it comes to fuel sources, human rights, religious tolerance, monetary and business issues, social issues, political agendas, national security, and foreign affairs.

Our perspective determines our belief systems and our own spiritual identity; our relationship with God, and our morals and values.

Our individual perspective determines how happy we are and how we get along with others. Do we have the capacity to see another’s perspective? Dale Carnegie said, "If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own".

“You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.” Friederich Nietzsche

Our individual perspective determines how tolerant we are of others, and dictates how we judge others. “Everybody is a genius. But, if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid.” ~ Einstein

On a national level, our cultural perspective can be determined by how we see and treat others. Do we have a localized national viewpoint or do we have a global perspective? Do we look for ways to get along or do we have an ‘us-against-them’ attitude?

Spirit naturally wants to unfold into greater and greater awareness, into larger expanses of people, into the collective through the individual, and it is at the individual level that we often throw obstacles into Spirit’s path.

Sometimes fear can play a powerful role in our perspective. When we would ordinarily have a more global attitude towards people and events, and freely give our time and money to charitable causes, fear from a bad economy can shunt our generosity; our perspective moves from other-oriented to self-oriented. Doubts and fears can cause us to change our perspective, diminishing Spirit’s movement through us.

Closely associated with fear is greed. Greed can be another powerful deterrent in allowing Spirit to unfold into the wholeness of Creation. When we are filled with greed, our focus is on hoarding, collecting, and compiling wealth, possessions, and power to the exclusion and even detriment of others. When a society is filled with greed, the ‘have-nots’ suffer, while the ‘haves’ do all within their power to distance themselves from the plight of the poor. It has ever been so.

We choose our perspective, one moment to another depending upon our focus. From out walking and having my eyes fixed on that single spot, I have had a couple of other realizations:

One, when I turn my head to the right, I notice that I can find another spot to where all the lines and rooftops now converge. If I move my gaze just a bit, there is another convergence. No matter where I look, the world responds and converges onto my beckoning focal point.

Spirit moves through us that way as well. No matter where we look, where we focus, the God within will respond and move to that position. If our inner perspective is God-aware enough, Spirit will move fully. If we are shunted by fear, greed, ignorance, or any other impediment, Spirit cannot move through us completely.

The second realization I have had is that when I finally get to the spot that I am focused upon, there is a whole lot more beyond it. We can focus on something so much that when we finally get there, we need to immediately reset our focus.

We may think we have it all figured out; we may think that our relationship with God, or our spouse, or other loved one is great, yet there is always more to learn and opportunities for growth.

I like the phrase, “Walk a mile, see a mile.” We may be on the path but we never know what is in store. We learn as we move forward, being guided and drawn by Spirit, although sometimes our lessons require that we meander more than progressing in a straight line. Just keep in mind what Oliver Prince Smith said, “We are not retreating; we're just advancing in a different direction.”

The last thing I have realized out walking is that when I am totally focused on that one spot, obsessed in all ways upon achieving that goal, I am blind to the beauty of the clouds and mountains around me. “If you do not raise your eyes,” says Antonio Porche, “you will think that you are the highest point.”

Sometimes we have to take a break, pull away, and change our attitude momentarily before we resume our focus. The Dali Lama said, “...if you feel “burnout” setting in, if you feel demoralized and exhausted, it is best, for the sake of everyone, to withdraw and restore yourself. The point is to have a long-term perspective.”

I actually think it is interesting that in linear perspective the lines converge where I focus. It makes me think it applies to God as well. As God focuses on each of us individually, which

is at all times, then Spirit is manipulating all good things to converge on us, that all lines are being drawn directly to us. As the object of God's love and focus, no matter how far we think God is away in the distance, it is an illusion, and all of Creation is converging on us.

God can see us from a distance, where we individually blend into the vast family of God; where we are a special, unique, and vital part of God's Creation and the Mosaic of Life. From this distance, God allows our mistakes, erred thinking and harmful actions to become inconsequential to the good that God has in store. Genesis 50:20 teaches this: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

God can also see us from a close, personal, and intimate perspective, where those erred thoughts and actions are very consequential, yet are forgiven. We are given opportunities to grow, learn, and develop a new attitude of mind – a higher-minded, more distant perspective in Spirit. And from this perspective, when we focus on the Spirit within, we are the vanishing point for God, the point of convergence for all of God's peace, love, joy, health, and abundance.

Let us pray....