

# **Chapter 1**

## ***How Vital is Vision?***

### **Outline**

<b>I.</b>	<b>The Sad Crisis .....</b>	<b>2</b>
	A. No Awareness of God's Plan	
	B. No Spiritual Vision in the Pulpit	
	C. No Spiritual Vision in the People	
	D. No Spiritual Vision in Public Life	
<b>II.</b>	<b>Serious Consequences.....</b>	<b>4</b>
	A. The People Cast Off Constraint	
	B. Society Begins to Disintegrate	
	C. The People Perish	
<b>III.</b>	<b>The Fox Formula .....</b>	<b>7</b>
	A. The Principle	
	B. The Punch Line	
	C. The Pursuit	
	D. The Analogy of the Church	
	E. Total World Vision	

# 1

## How Vital is Vision?

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18*

In spiritual terminology, "Divine perspective," "wisdom," "insight," "illumination," and "vision" are roughly equivalent terms. Many passages in the Word of God reveal the importance of such vision. Psalm 119:18 says, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law." Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of Thy Words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple." James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." In Ephesians 1:15-19 and the context, Paul recorded one of the greatest of his prayers. I personally believe it is the most important prayer one human being can pray for another. It is a prayer for "illumination," the one subjective essential for understanding the things of God after the New Birth. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see." The two indispensables for spiritual understanding are regeneration and illumination.

The text of this study shows us negatively how important "vision" is. An individual's seeing depends on the "lens" he looks through, just as his hearing depends of the "filter" he listens through. As we begin this study of the Master's Great Mandate to His people, it is necessary that we understand the value of vision. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This is a cosmopolitan verse; it applies universally and absolutely.

### The Sad Crisis

#### No Awareness of God's Plan

Think, first, of the sad crisis that is specified here. "Where there is no vision." The word "where" might be paraphrased "wherever," so this is a universal statement. What does "no vision" mean in Biblical terms? It means that there is no awareness of God and His Perfect Plan. It means that Satan, "the god of this world," has "blinded the minds of men" to the only things that really and ultimately count! They cannot see or understand these things without regeneration and/or illumination (see I Corinthians 2:9-14). Thus, there is no continuous traffic between heaven and the hearts of men. There is no commerce with that which is invisible, eternal, spiritual -- and real. There is no listening to God and looking to Him. In short, "no vision" means that men do not see "the High and Holy One, Who inhabits Eternity," so we are limited to our little horizons and our selfish, petty, sinful plans. You see, everything begins with true vision. Please note the word "true." I use it in distinction to no vision, false vision, and limited vision.

#### No Spiritual Vision in the Pulpit

Imagine no spiritual vision in the PULPIT of the church you attend. Imagination is not required if you visit many churches! I Samuel 3:1 says, "The Word of God was precious

(scarce) in those days, and there was no open (frequent) vision." A reading of the national history that ensued from this point will reveal that tragic things resulted from such a loss of vision.

What if there were no Gospel preached in the pulpit of your church? No awareness of man's lostness without Christ? No trust in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? No unfolding of the deep, rich, eternal counsels of God? No exposure of the infinite riches hidden in the Word of God? No equipping of the listeners to "live in heaven and on earth at once?" No teaching of the vast vocation of the Spirit-filled, Word-adapted, prayer-oriented, disciple-building, Christian life? Imagine a pulpit with "no vision."

Pastor, to what degree are you in doubt about the effectiveness of what you are presently doing? Wholesome doubt is the hammer that breaks the windows that are clouded with human fancies. That wholesome doubt is a very hopeful sign. Without an honest admission of such doubt and a prayerful investigation of the Divine alternative, the pulpit you occupy may continue void of vision.

A great Southern Baptist pastor was praying prostrate on the floor of his study one morning, asking God for an anointing of the Holy Spirit's power upon his ministry. He said that the Holy Spirit responded to him as clearly as if He spoke out loud, saying, "My child, with plans no bigger than yours, you don't need My power!" Pastor, is your vision God-big—for His glory? The only eternity-sized vision any of us will ever need is in the Great Commission given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. If your pulpit is not obsessed with the terms "make disciples" and "all nations," how can God possibly be expected to put Heaven's approval upon it? Without this magnificent obsession, the pulpit of your church is marked by "no vision."

#### No Spiritual Vision in the People

Then, it is only a short step to a PEW, a people, with no spiritual vision of these things. A rule of inner church life is, "like pastor, like people." The people will gradually take on the spiritual profile of their pastor. Suppose, in this succession, that the people in the pew did not have, or lost, their vision of the supernal glory of the Gospel? And of the absolute magnificence of Jesus Christ? And of the greatness and glory of our worldwide task? And of the possibility of impacting the whole wide world with Jesus Christ and His Gospel as the early Christians did? Someone truly said, "The steps from risktaker to caretaker to undertaker are very short steps."

Why do church members get much more excited about a thousand OTHER things than about God, spiritual things, heaven, hell, and eternity? The answer? No vision, thus no motivation, because motivation arises out of vision.

I will not gain any friends by saying this, but the typical Southern Baptist Church is run far more on the basis of tradition than on the basis of illumination. Someone wryly said, "Baptists had better do and say everything right the first time, because they are going to do it the same way from now on."

#### No Spiritual Vision in Public Life

When the loss of vision occurs in pulpit and pew, we may be sure that there will be no spiritual vision in PUBLIC LIFE. What if Christians totally lost the vision of their role as salt and light (Matthew 5:14-16) in a decaying and dark world? What if we lost our vision of ourselves as "bodily substitutes," or representatives of Jesus Christ, "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life?" What if we lost our vision of our high status as "ambassadors for Christ," commissioned to mediate our King's cause in this dark and alien world? But we don't have to guess about it. The absence of vision is clearly observable in pulpit, pew, and public life—merely by examining the occurrence of the consequences declared in this text. So think, too, of . . .

### **Serious Consequences**

Think of the serious consequences that follow the sad crisis of "no vision." "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The word translated "perish" is a most revealing Hebrew word. It is frighteningly full. It has several different meanings. It means to cast off restraint, to loosen, to dissolve, to break up, to go to pieces, to perish." So look at the tragic consequences of a loss of vision among Christians.

#### **The People Cast Off Restraint**

First, the people of the society, of the community, of the church, of the home "CAST OFF RESTRAINT." This is the MORAL effect of a loss of vision. A loss of vision produces moral anarchy, in which "every man does what is right in his own eyes." Incidentally, note that when there is no awareness of ultimate reality, men do what is "right in their own eyes," not necessarily what is apparently wrong to them. Remember, too, that "right" and "wrong" are always relative terms to those with merely natural or carnal minds. "Right" and "wrong" are absolutes only to those with a truly spiritual mind. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is death" (Proverbs 14:12). It is absolutely amazing to observe how people who are totally blind to spiritual reality give total credibility to their own understanding!

That men everywhere today have cast off restraint is agreed by everyone. Autonomy, anarchy, and self-determination are increasingly wide-spread. The difference between the Son of God and sinners is evident at this point. Jesus said, "I do always the things which please my Father" (John 8:29), but the motto of sinners (indeed, the essence of sin) is, "I do always those things which please me." Some future sculptor may picture twentieth century man with his arms wrapped about himself in loving embrace, kissing his own image in a mirror. However, lest the tragic seriousness of such a situation be absorbed in mild humor, let the words of John Milton in the lips of Satan in Paradise Lost correct us. Satan showed the inevitable acknowledgement of sinners who pursue their selfishness without restraint when he said, "Myself am hell."

Sometime ago, the newspapers carried the story of a 20 year old mechanic's helper at Idlewild Airport in New York. He wrote a letter to a friend in the air force in Texas. The letter told how the young man had broken off with his girl friend, and how he planned to

take one of the Pan American planes. He stole a twin-engine DC-3 and sent it roaring down the runway. It failed to gain altitude, crashed, and he was killed. The news item closed with his words from the letter, "I'll be on my own at the controls, just like I've always been—alone." This story is repeated again and again, in different clothes, every day—and it always comes out the same. The self-managed person always crashes and burns! Because the ideas of men disagree so radically when each is a law unto himself, world tensions continue to mount. Where there is no frequent vision among men, no clear word from the living God, no vital Christianity, then the people cast off restraint.

#### Society Begins to Disintegrate

Second, this strong Hebrew verb also means "TO DISINTEGRATE." This is the SOCIAL effect of a loss of vision. Sin, which increases proportionately in a society with the loss of spiritual vision, has a centrifugal force about it, driving men outward from the True Center of Life, God Himself, and thus driving them from each other. So we have a fragmented, divided world. Society begins to "loosen, dissolve, break up, go to pieces." The word "split" is used to describe many situations in our world. We have split atoms, split families, split nations, a split world, and split personalities. A psychiatrist pulled into a service station one day driving a pickup truck. In the back of the truck were three chairs. When asked where he was going, he replied, "I'm going to visit a schizophrenic!" How often individuals are "going to pieces." A college girl said to her room-mate, "I feel like a walking Civil War." Her roommate replied, "That's nothing, I'm a World War!" An individual can weather most any problem if he is inwardly united, but he is vulnerable to any attack if he is in controversy with himself.

The story of Judas in the New Testament concludes with these words: "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18). As you know, Judas hanged himself, and this physical collapse resulted either from his ineptness in trying to hang himself, or as a result of the bloating and decay that resulted from his dead body hanging on the rope for some time. The Amplified Bible says, "He burst open in the middle of his body. As gruesome as this sounds, it gives us a perfect illustration. One translation says that Judas "disintegrated." He literally "came apart." But this was only a final, physical symptom of what had gradually happened for at least three years previous. He had displaced the only possible center, the Divine "cement," which would have integrated his personality and made it a unified whole. He really "went to pieces in the middle." And Judas could well be the "patron saint" of this age. The Bible tells us (Colossians 1:17) that in Jesus Christ alone do "all things hold together," but when men lose "the Beatific Vision of Jesus Christ," society has no cementing influence, no cohesive force, no integrating center. In Marc Connally's play, *Green Pastures*, the angel Gabriel has been striding the ramparts of heaven, becoming more and more disturbed by the chaos and turmoil he witnesses on the earth. Finally, he turns to God and says, "Lawd! Lawd! It looks like everything nailed down is a-coming loose!" Individuals and institutions disintegrate without Christ in control. This is the social result of a loss of spiritual vision.

#### The People Perish

Finally, the Hebrew word is accurately translated in the King James Version. It means to "perish". "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Compassion is surely called for here, simply because the commodity in danger is "people." If it were animals or plants, it would not be nearly so serious. But it is people, individuals like you and me. They "perish." In John 3:16, the word "perish" is placed in antithesis to having "everlasting life." To perish means to be involved forever in a living death and a dying life—in a place called hell. Meanwhile, I Corinthians 1:18 indicates that people without Christ are in a present state of perishing. This perishing of people is the SPIRITUAL effect of a loss of vision by Christians. Three people every second perish without Christ—and the Church has largely lost its vision! Hell fills, and Heaven has vacancies yet to be filled! All because the Church's vision has faded!

Years ago, a wealthy business man went one year to India on a Bengal tiger hunt. He was in India for six weeks. Upon his return home, he went to the mid-week service of the church he attended. The church was discussing its annual budget. The businessman shocked the entire church by proposing that all foreign missions giving be omitted from the budget. An elderly gentleman asked the reason for this strange proposal. The reply was, "I have just returned from a six-week trip to India, and during that time, I did not see a single missionary." The older gentleman asked, "And what was the purpose of your trip to India?" The reply was, "I went there on a Bengal tiger hunting trip." "And how many Bengal tigers did you see?" "I saw six of them." The older man said, "That's very peculiar. I spent thirty years in India as a missionary, and I saw hundreds and hundreds of missionaries. But I have yet to see my first Bengal tiger in India!" So very, very much depends on our perspective and our vision.

The words of Proverbs 29:18 were written by King Solomon, a man in whose reign the vision faded. And there was no more disastrous failure in the history of Israel than that of Solomon. The people went to pieces! The nation collapsed! The Kingdom was divided!

#### We Must See Things From God's Point of View

The alternative before us is clear: it is either "VISION OR DIVISION!" This is true universally, nationally, locally, but especially is it true in the Church of Jesus Christ and in the individual Christian life! We must, we must, wait upon God in quietness and prayer, armed with a deep sense of need and a teachable heart, and ask Him to restore the vision—of His overwhelming Personal Glory, and of His overpowering Plan for us and the world!

Dawson Trotman, the founder of The Navigators, said, "*Spiritual vision is getting on your heart what is on God's heart—the world!*" Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians might "*see things from God's point of view*" (Colossians 1:9, Phillips). What a revolution would occur if we did!

"One man awake  
Can waken another;  
The second can waken  
His next-door brother.  
The three awake  
Can rouse a town

By turning the whole  
Place upside down  
The many awake  
Can make such a fuss  
That it finally awakens  
The rest of us.

One man up  
With down in his eyes,  
MULTIPLIES!"

### The Fox Formula

An allegorical illustration to help our understanding of world vision is called the fox formula or the "fox scenario."

The Principle

*The principle is:* **When dogs run in packs they will invariably do one or more of four things:**

1. ***They will sleep.*** That means practiced, calculated indifference.
2. ***They will secure their own survival.*** They will eat, sleep, potty and all of the other necessities for their own survival.
3. ***If they are a friendly pack, they will accept new members to the pack when new members apply or adhere to the rules of the pack.*** Those new members will then be allowed to run and the pack will absorb them.
4. ***They will fight among themselves.***

The Punch Line

*Now, here's the punch line:* **UNTIL A FOX GOES BY.** Once a fox goes by all those other things are suddenly amalgamated in the pursuit of the fox. They are completely forgotten for the moment.

The Pursuit

During the pursuit of the fox:

1. They won't sleep unless it is absolutely necessary for them to then get back on the chase.
2. They won't secure their own survival, eating and drinking will be immaterial to them except to stay on the chase after the fox.
3. It'll be incidental that they accept new members, they won't even notice that. Their attention is on the fox. They accept new members, but they won't notice it. It won't make any difference. In other words, the size of the institution at the moment that the fox in being pursued, is immaterial altogether. Jesus did it with twelve men, and

died in appearance of a total flop. But the fox was in front of his men.

4. Or, they will fight among themselves until the fox runs by.

### The Analogy of the Church

Now, the premise of this is: *the church is Christians running in packs*. That's all it is, if I can follow the analogy here. Now it's much more than that theologically and otherwise, but it's Christians running in packs.

*When Christians run in packs*, they will do one or more of four things:

- They will sleep
- They will secure their own survival
- They will happily accept new members when they apply, if they are friendly, or
- They will fight among themselves—UNTIL THE FOX GOES BY.

Now the question is, what is the fox? The normal answer is: the pastor runs little foxes seasonally in front of his church to keep his people in pursuit, to keep them amalgamated and to prevent those four declinations. So, we have a spring revival in the church to amalgamate the attention of the church after the little fox, and then we have a fall revival, and then we have a swell of emphasis, and when the church gets back down in a trough, we have another swell of emphasis to amalgamate the attention of the people.

When in reality, if the pastor's vision would permit him to see, Christianity rigs incredibly the only fox that will ever totally amalgamate a person's attention, totally consolidate his devotion and command his attention forever. Once he sees that fox, unless he backslides into a distraction or a diversion from that fox, he'll be in pursuit of that fox forever.

### Total World Vision

What is the fox? The fox is TOTAL WORLD VISION. Where the church lives always outwardly never inwardly. In other words the business of the church is not to build itself, not to build an institution, not to funnel members into it. It should only funnel members into it to get after the fox so their attention is immediately turned out. The Bible says, "He who believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his inner most being . . ." It's always out! "I come that they might have life and have it overflowing." What direction does overflow always go? It always goes out! He said, "Begin at Jerusalem and go out." You're never to come in except to live to get the resources inside to be headed out.

The reason 3.3 billion people, who two thousand years after the fact have still never heard of Jesus is because the church is doing on of those four things. Running little foxes instead of consumed with the fox that Jesus gave, and His strategy of ***seeing the masses through the man, and then building the man to impact the masses to the ends of the earth and until the end of time.***