The Eye of the Beholder
John 9:13-41

Belief vs. Unbelief

Unbelief breeds INDECISION and INDIFFERENCE.

Indecision is caused by:
Seeking truth through MAJORITY OPINION
Demanding UNDERSTANDING BEFORE FAITH.

“Faith always precedes understanding.”

Belief breeds SIMPLE TRUTH.

Unbelief breeds FEAR.

Belief breeds CONFIDENCE AND CLARITY.

Spiritual Sight vs. Spiritual Blindness

Spiritual Sight:
1. REQUIRES divine initiative.
2. RECOGNIZES Jesus.
3. RESPONDS with worship.

Spiritual Blindness
1. RECEIVES judgment.
2. REFUSES to acknowledge its sad condition.
3. REJECTS the help it so desperately needs.

I. Opening Question: Why and how can two people respond to the same event and the work of God in completely opposite ways?
   a. Short Answer: “No one comes to me unless the Father draws him” (John 6)
   b. Long answer
   c. Proverbs 20:5
      The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.
   d. God moves in mysterious ways: Compare the five different healings of blindness in the gospels. Sometimes He touches, sometimes spits, sometimes questions. ALWAYS different.
II. Important lessons for us here:
   a. Stand in awe of God and His ways. (Consider the other blind men.) Do not put Him in a box
      i. Have you ever found yourself predicting? Don’t make your walk with God into a chess match.
      ii. Watch God moving and bringing himself into focus for this man Christ has healed.
      iii. God may choose to spit in your eye or He may touch you gently on the shoulder. He’s the doctor.
   b. Be very careful when you examine another person’s Christian experience – either to follow its example or to question its genuineness
      i. They both have their place. Read Christian biography.
      ii. We Christians, we children of the family of God, are often at our most proud and presumptuous when we compare our testimonies and our Christian experience. In fact we look a lot like the Pharisees here who missed the miracle and the hand of God b/c it did not fit their mold or preconceived notions. Let’s look at that.

III. Tie-in: Let’s pick up the story
   a. The Pharisee’s debate: Sabbath
   b. Not Scripture, but their man-made (Rabbinical) interpretations and additions. For example:
      i. OK to spit on a rock, but not to spit in the dirt for that constituted kneading, like kneading dough, which was work (better be a good shot)
      ii. You may treat a person in dire medical need to keep their condition from worsening, but not so as to improve the condition.

IV. Compare and contrast growing faith with a hardening heart in this passage
   a. Unbelief breeds indifference and indecision
      i. Reveal their true colors right out of the gate: blind indifference.
      ii. Explained nothing, only explained away.
      iii. Looking at these Pharisees, we see that their theology has blinded them.
      iv. Reasons for indecision
         1. Majority opinion, but when it come to understanding the ways of God…
            a. But mom had it right: If your friends jumped off a cliff, would you jump too?
b. Jesus had it right too: this is a case of the blind leading the blind, so that majority opinion is of no help at all. Even with Christians, be careful.

c. Our only true God is revelation

2. Also notice that this whole discussion for the Pharisees is built on the question of “how”. They ask it 4 times. They want to understand before they believe, but faith always precedes understanding, so we turn to the man who was healed and see that he is learning that very lesson. Not only has his physical sight returned, but the eyes of his heart are slowly opening as well.

b. Belief breeds simple truth.
   i. Observe his simple reply in v. 17: he’s a prophet.
   ii. For any who like me have wallowed through seasons of doubt & skepticism, please get this. Faith precedes understanding and belief breeds simple truth.
   iii. I did not say simplistic. The man has not answered all the questions. He says later “Whether Jesus is a sinner, I don’t know” – which to our theologically trained ears sounds like heresy. But God is clearly moving in this man, and he, unlike the Pharisees and all who are proud and self-sufficient, is not afraid of the unknown. He will not allow the unknown to obscure what he does know.
   iv. Principle: To those who are doubting: “to those who have, more will be given.”
   v. Lesson: To all of us: admire the man’s boldness in standing up for Christ and having the courage to hold to what he does know to be true.

c. Unbelief breeds fear
   i. These parents have completely rejected their son, thrown him to the wolves. They have done the unthinkable because of fear.
      1. Important to understand what they feared: being thrown out of the temple.
      2. Fear can make us do the most despicable things. It clouds our judgment. It steals our warmth and even our natural affections. See it in these parents. See it also in the Pharisees. And see it in yourself. If you have given way to fear, there is something you can do. Do you think this man who had been healed was afraid? Do you think he was praying?
   ii. Perhaps his prayer sounded something like the words of David in Psalm 27.

d. Belief breeds confidence and clarity
i. See his confidence grow – read verses 26-27, slowly gaining.

ii. Read 28-34. Suddenly this man not only sees, but he starts to see through

1. The Lord takes great pleasure in revealing the truth to those who will humble themselves. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:25 "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." And again, “those who seek will find.”

2. One of the more interesting stories of faith you will ever read is that of G.K. Chesterton in his book Orthodoxy. Chesterton reports that he had given up any hope of knowing God by age 12 and that he was an atheist by age 16. He read all the skeptical and atheistic literature he could get his hands on, and yet ironically, by the grace of God, it did not reinforce his unbelief, but created, as he says, his first “doubts of doubt”. He began to see through so much of what had buoyed his hard heart. His breakthrough came when he began to understand all the inconsistencies and the hatred and the anger and (I quote) “it did for one wild moment cross my mind that those might not be the best judges of the relation of religion to happiness, who, by their own account, had neither one nor the other.”

V. As the curtain goes down on this dialogue...

a. The stage is set for the Savior.

b. Pharisees have been shown for who they really are

c. The real miracle is about to take place. Not the restoration of physical sight, but the conversion of a sinner like you and me. Remember what I said about the dangers of comparing our stories. If you are one of those who came to Christ at a young age, you were never on drugs, or rescued miraculously in a wild storm, the fact that Christ has revealed Himself to you is no less a miracle than the story we have just read.

VI. Learn some things about what happens when (as Paul prayed for the Ephesians) the eyes of this man’s heart are fully opened. Happens to believers and those coming to faith.

a. Spiritual eyes require divine initiative.

b. Spiritual eyes recognize Jesus.

c. Spiritual eyes respond with worship.

VII. But to those who have continually hardened their hearts in unbelief, the words of Jesus prove true.
He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. Mt. 13:11-13

a. Spiritual blindness receives judgment
b. Spiritual blindness cannot recognize its sad condition.
c. Spiritual blindness rejects the help that it desperately needs.

He is blind who, aware of his own blindness, seeks a remedy to cure his disease. In this way the meaning will be, “If you would acknowledge your disease, it would not be altogether incurable; but now because you think that you are in perfect health, you continue in a desperate state.” When [Jesus] says that they who are blind have no sin, this does not excuse ignorance, as if it were harmless, and were placed beyond the reach of condemnation. He only means that the disease may easily be cured, when it is truly felt; because, when a blind man is desirous to obtain deliverance, God is ready to assist him; but they who, insensible to their diseases, despise the grace of God, are incurable. – John Calvin, Commentary on The Gospel According to John