

“Spiritual Tunnel Vision”

What is commonly called “Tunnel Vision” is more specifically “Kalnienk Vision.” The condition refers to a restriction of one’s field of vision, but with the retention of central vision; *i.e.* as if looking *through a tunnel*. Though it can have many different causes, the most common culprit is the consistent restriction of the field of vision, which causes the eyes to be “trained” to only focus on the specific area in which one is looking. For instance, if you looked through a periscope for long periods of time, or wore a welding helmet, diving mask, or something else which only allowed you to see the area or objects immediately in front of you, tunnel vision could easily occur. The result would be that you would only be able to “see” those things at which you specifically looked or directed your attention. It is a dangerous condition *physically*, but can be *spiritually* devastating.

As is the case with the *physical* impairment, *spiritual* Tunnel Vision is most often self-inflicted. We repetitively and consistently focus our attention on a specific passage, interpretation, or doctrine until we lose the ability to see anything else. This is especially dangerous because it becomes self-perpetuating. A certain passage that we think contains a cherished belief is so much the focus of our attention that we get to the point that we will not even consider other passages which clearly contradict our interpretation of the one upon which we’ve become affixed. “Spiritual Tunnel Vision” has occurred! Let’s consider some examples.

John 3:16 is a beautiful and powerful passage that highlights both God’s tremendous love for man, as well as man’s obligation to believe in order to attain eternal life. But for some, this passage has come to be a proof-text for salvation by “faith only.” Has intense focus on this verse clouded our ability to see its context? Can we no longer see that in v.5 Jesus also required one to be baptized (“*born of water and the Spirit*”? Can we no longer see that v.36 enjoined obedience to our belief in order to attain eternal life? Do we no longer see the example immediately preceding v.16 in the text? It references the O.T. story of fiery serpents being sent by God among the Israelites as punishment for their complaining in the wilderness (see Numbers 21:4-9). The people who were bitten by the serpents had to look upon the replica that God commanded Moses to erect on a standard in the midst of the camp or die. They couldn’t just “believe” and “accept” that God would heal them, they had to meet His requirement of obedience by going to and looking upon the serpent. Additionally, have we become so intently focused upon John 3:16 that we no longer can see James 2:24, “*You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.*” This passage doesn’t teach that one is saved by “works alone” any more than John 3:16 teaches that one is saved by “faith alone.” But we cannot become so specifically focused on either one that the other can no longer be seen. Both passages are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and neither is more important than the other!

Romans 8:38-39 is likewise a tremendously comforting passage which teaches the love and protection God manifests toward His children. But does it say that “once we are saved, we are always saved”? The passage makes it very clear that nothing can separate the saved from the love God has for them. But does that mean they will necessarily inherit the blessings of eternal salvation unconditionally? Can a loving parent not disown and disinherit a rebellious child? Of course they can! But will our loving Father do that to His unloving and disobedient children? Don’t fall prey to spiritual tunnel vision! Note these passages: “*keep yourselves in the love of God*” (Jude 21); “*be on your guard lest, being carried away by unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness*” (2Peter 3:17); “*Take care, brethren, lest there be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God*” (Hebrews 3:12). Have we become so focused on a passage that we think teaches a comforting doctrine that we can no longer see that every book of the N.T. (except one, Philemon) contains warnings specifically designed to prevent the very thing that supposedly cannot happen- losing salvation once it has been gained?

Please, read your New Testament- all of it; and don’t become so focused on what you may want it to say that you cannot see what it does say. I do not have all the answers, nor do I claim to have them- but, I do

know that we cannot give any one passage an interpretation that clearly contradicts another. We have to take it all, and keep it all together to “see clearly” what God would have us to believe and obey. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)