

Spiritual Focus

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Introduction

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines focus as “the centre of [one’s] interest or activity.” Sinful men focus on their wants and wishes. Saints focus upon serving God and their fellowman.

Pride is often reflected in the eyes (Proverbs 21:4; Isaiah 37:21-23), so also is humility (Ezra 9:5-6; Luke 18:9-14).

Proverbs 21:4 ... 4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, The lamp of the wicked, is sin. (NASB95)

Isaiah 37:21-23 ... 21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent word to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, 22 this is the word that the Lord has spoken against him: “She has despised you and mocked you, The virgin daughter of Zion; She has shaken her head behind you, The daughter of Jerusalem! 23 “Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised your voice And haughtily lifted up your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel! (NASB95)

Ezra 9:5-6 ... 5 But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the Lord my God; 6 and I said, “O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. (NASB95)

Luke 18:9-14 ... 9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ 13 “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ 14 “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (NASB95)

When tempted to glory in our possessions or preeminence, we must lower our sights. We must also raise our vision, recognizing the value of sacrifice and service.

Lower Your Sights

Regarding Possessions

Material abundance is not an accurate measure of success (Luke 12:13-21).

Luke 12:13-21 ... 13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” 16 And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” ’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ 21 “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (NASB95)

The love of money supplants contentment, suborns faith, and is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

1 Timothy 6:6-10 ... 6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (NASB95)

Let us trust, not in uncertain riches, but in God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

1 Timothy 6:17-19 ... 17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (NASB95)

Regarding Preeminence

Public acclaim is not a true measure of greatness (Matthew 23:1-12).

Matthew 23:1-12 ... 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. 4 "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5 "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. 6 "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 8 "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11 "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (NASB95)

Preening for preeminence only creates conflict (3 John 9-15).

3 John 9-15 ... 9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. 13 I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; 14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. 15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name. (NASB95)

Recognizing the destructiveness of pride, let us cultivate a humble and childlike disposition (Matthew 18:1-6).

Matthew 18:1-6 ... 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (NASB95)

Raise Your Vision

Regarding Sacrifice

We must present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Romans 12:1-2 ... 1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (NASB95)

Christian faith is evidenced by sacrifice and service (Philippians 2:14-18).

Philippians 2:14-18 ... 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18 You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. (NASB95)

Therefore, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Hebrews 13:15-16 ... 15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (NASB95)

Regarding Service

Greatness is manifested in service (Luke 22:24-27).

Luke 22:24-27 ... 24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (NASB95)

Each must humbly labor for the betterment of the whole (Romans 12:3-13).

Romans 12:3-13 ... 3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (NASB95)

Let us seek, not our own personal interests, but also the interests of others (Philippians 2:1-4).

Philippians 2:1-4 ... 1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (NASB95)

Conclusion

God stands in judgment of human pride (Proverbs 29:23).

Proverbs 29:23 ... 23 A man's pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor. (NASB95)

Let us trust, not in our own ability or accomplishment, but in the power of God (Isaiah 40:27-31).

Isaiah 40:27-31 ... 27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God"? 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. 29 He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. 30 Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, 31 Yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary. (NASB95)