

Introduction

Today, I'm going to preach about one of our culture's deepest concerns. It's the **"right to privacy"** about which so much is written and said. That term does have different meanings in Constitutional Law, common law, and statutory law. But United States Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis articulated what it generally means. It's **"the right to be left alone,"** he said. That's what people want isn't it? It's to be left alone to do whatever they desire without being observed and assessed.

But in relation to God, they don't get that. In relation to Him, there is no right to privacy and thus no privacy at all. I know that because it's precisely what our texts teach us.

The Eyes of God

In 2 Chronicles 16, the nation of Israel blockaded the nation of Judah in order to get concessions from it. Judah's king, Asa, responded by not trusting **"the LORD"** to deliver it. He made a treaty with the king of Aram instead. But God's purpose, as verses 7-8 imply, was for Judah to conquer Aram not enter into an alliance with it. So, in verse 9, He sent His prophet Hanani to denounce King Asa for what he did and to declare his punishment, **"You will surely have wars."**

Well, Hanani revealed a critical insight about God in doing so, **"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth."** Our companion text, Proverbs 15:3, reveals the same insight, **"The eyes of the LORD are in every place."** That term, **"the eyes of the LORD,"** is what is called anthropomorphism. An anthropomorphism is a figure of speech that describes God's abilities and powers in terms of body parts and bodily movements. God is spirit and has no body or brain. But the Bible writes as if He does to assist us in understanding His abilities and powers. The body part our texts uses is eyes.

Stop and consider what human eyes do. They observe things with the result that people know what is observed. This is what we call being

“eyewitnesses.” Listen to this famous eyewitness account and tell me if you can identify the event it describes: **“It’s fire and it’s crashing! There’s smoke, and there’s flames, now, and the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring mast. Oh, the humanity.”** That was news reporter Herbert Morrison describing what he saw in 1937 – the German airship Hindenburg bursting into flames and crashing to the ground. His eyes observed with the result that he knew.

That illustrates what the anthropomorphism **“the eyes of the LORD”** conveys. He has the ability to observe things and to know as a result of doing so. In our 2 Chronicles text, He observed Asa write and sign the treaty with Aram. Or in 1937, He observed the Hindenburg burst into flames and crash to the ground. There’s no doubt about it. God has the ability to observe and know.

The Nature of God’s Observation

And that ability of His is limitless. Our texts teach us three things about the nature of God’s observation.

First it’s all-encompassing. Notice two qualifying phrases: **“throughout the earth”** in 2 Chronicles 16:9 and **“in every place”** in Proverbs 15:3. They suggest the persistence of God’s observation. He always observes. They also suggest the range of His observation. He observes everything everywhere. The implication is staggering. No one ever does anything or nothing ever happens that He doesn’t observe and know. That means He has observed and knows everything we’ve done.

I read about the IRS receiving a letter containing \$400 cash and an anonymous confession. The sender stated that he had cheated on his taxes, felt remorse, and was making restitution. No one on earth knows who that person is, but God does. He actually observed him cheat on his taxes and write the letter.

It’s true. God’s observation is all-encompassing. He observes everything, every moment, everywhere.

Our texts teach us a second thing about the nature of God’s

observation. According to Proverbs 15:11, it's wholly penetrating. Sheol and Abaddon refer to the world beyond the grave. Humans can never observe and know what's in it, but God does. If He observes and knows that, how much more so does He observe and know what's in people.

I was standing in line at a gas station last week. After the woman at the front of the line paid and left, I took a step forward, whereupon a young man, who was standing to the side, gruffly chastised me for doing so. **"I suppose you're going to say that you didn't see me standing in line,"** he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. I kindly replied that I didn't know he was in line and apologized for moving ahead of him. A human being could observe and know that response. He or she, however, couldn't observe and know the inner thoughts and feelings that prompted it. But God did observe and know that. He observed and knew if I was being fearful or Christlike?

His observation is wholly penetrating. It isn't just our outer behavior that He observes and knows. It's our mental, emotional, and volitional processes as well from which the behavior comes. He always observes and knows what's in us.

There's a third thing that our texts teach us about the nature of God's observation. It's exceedingly sensitive. Notice the strong language the wise man uses in Proverbs 15:8-9. God observes and knows what the wicked are and do, which are an **"abomination"** to Him. They **"disgust"** Him. He also observes and knows what the righteous are and do, which He **"loves."** They **"delight"** Him. One of His qualities is that He's impassable. That means no one and no thing can inflict injury or pain on Him, including what we call emotional pain. But He's personal as well. That means that He does experience things, including what we call emotions, in the depths of His being. In verses 8-9, what He experiences in response to the wicked and righteous are disgust and delight.

Again, the implication is staggering. God not only always observes everything everywhere, He always reacts as well either adversely or favorably. When I apologized to the gruff young man in the gas station,

God not only observed that, He reacted as well adversely or favorably depending upon my motive in doing so. Ponder what that implies. Everything that we think, feel, and do impacts the dominant reality of the universe, God, in the very depths of His being.

So there we have it – the nature of God’s observation. It’s all-encompassing, wholly penetrating, and exceedingly sensitive. He doesn’t just observe, in other words, He gazes.

That’s the life-altering truth and people respond in one of two ways to it, both of which I’d like to identify and explain.

Avoiding God’s Gaze

First, most people avoid it. I stated that the right to privacy is one of our culture’s deepest concerns. People generally desire and demand it. There’s an overriding reason they do.

A grandmother, Nana, tells an instructive little story about her two-and-a-half-year old granddaughter, Larissa, with whom she was relaxing in the backyard. Larissa wanted to water the purple flowers and Nana allowed it. But she warned her not to spill water in the dirt because it makes mud and mud gets thing dirty. Larissa of course was soon not watering the flowers but making mud. Nana, who was reading with her back turned to her granddaughter, soon discovered she was, cleaned up the mess, told her not to do it again, and returned to her reading, but now facing Larissa. Predictably though, Larissa began making mud again, saying as she did, **“Don’t look at me, Nana. Okay?”** Nana agreed but three times she looked up at her, and three times she declared, **“Don’t look at me, Nana. Okay?”**

That honest response illustrates the overriding reason people demand privacy. It’s because it’s necessary to human beings that they be unobserved in their wrong. Others observing and knowing the bad things they do makes them feel guilty, insecure, and even fearful. So, they demand privacy – to be left alone in the wrong they do.

But the **“eyes of the LORD”** don’t allow it, which is why they do

what they do. They try to avoid His gaze by denying it. They choose to believe that He and thus it don't exist. That is, I believe, the primary reason atheists are atheists. Their problem isn't that they can't believe in God. It's that's they don't want to. If they did, they'd have to admit that He's observing their wrong, which they desperately want to avoid.

Lynn Anderson tells about the atheist owner of a topless bar who contended he wanted to believe in God but couldn't. After several hours of conversation with him, Anderson said, **"I don't think your problem is that you can't believe; I think it's that you won't believe."** The atheist paused and then agreed: **"Yeah, I guess that's true. I can't imagine sleeping with just one woman. I can't imagine going with less money than I make – which I'd have to do because I lie to get it."** That atheist avoided God's gaze by denying its existence.

Christians do something similar. They avoid God's gaze not by denying it, but by ignoring it. They're practical atheists in that regard. They put His gaze out of their minds. They don't take it into account in their thinking and acting any more than atheists do. They think and act as if He doesn't observe and know what they do.

Welcoming God's Gaze

That's one response to God's gaze. We avoid it. But there's a second response. We welcome it by doing two things.

First, believe in God's gaze as I've explained it today. Understanding is the basis of belief. So, we understand by learning all we can about His omnipresence and omniscience from our *First Aim* study.

We welcome God's gaze by doing a second thing. Focus on it. Be constantly aware of it. Purposefully place our minds on it. Routinely take it into account in our thinking and acting.

In the context of discipleship to Jesus, doing those two things dramatically transforms us. We eventually find ourselves thinking, feeling, acting, and reacting in harmony with God's nature and will in the **"stuff"** of day-to-day life. When we undertake a task, we sense His

assisting presence and power. When we have an emergency, we feel Him in the midst of it supporting and providing. When we're praised, we're cognizant of His goodness and blessing that caused us to be. When we're disappointed, we're conscious that He is in and around us, working things together for good. When we're tempted, we're compelled and empowered to walk in His way, not out of it. That's the kind of experience, if we're disciples of Jesus, that believing in and focusing on God's gaze creates.

Let's go back to my gas station experience. I've purposefully welcomed God's gaze in my life for several decades. So, I immediately perceived, interpreted, and experienced that young man's disparaging remark pursuant to it. God was observing I knew and I felt secure because He was. Aware of His watchful eyes upon me, I felt compelled to do what I knew He wanted me to do – what Jesus would if He were me. I overcame evil with good by being loving and kind with the young man. I admit it. 30 years ago I would have responded in kind – with a disparaging remark right back. But I didn't because welcoming God's gaze, in the context of my discipleship to Jesus, has transformed me.

Conclusion

Those then are the two options before us. Avoid God's gaze or welcome it. Which we choose defines our lives now, as I've already explained, and forever. Listen to the words of C.S. Lewis and of John in that regard. Referring to the Second Coming of Jesus, Lewis wrote: **"In the end, that face which is the delight or terror of the universes must be turned upon each of us, conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised."** John wrote (in Revelation 6:15-16) that multitudes will cry out to the mountains and rocks, **"Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne."** John and Lewis teach us that if we welcome God's gaze now, we'll get glory forever. If we avoid it now, we'll get shame forever. The message is clear. In relation to God, there is no privacy now or forever. Let's think, feel, and act accordingly. Let's welcome His gaze.