

**You say, I am rich, and increased with goods,
and have need of nothing;
and know not that you are... blind...**

Revelation 3:17

Can we really be blind and not know it? The answer might be disturbing.

First, a little anatomy lesson on eyesight.

There are two types of vision cells in the eyes—rods and cones. The 120 million rods are for low light conditions and are 100 times more sensitive to light than cones; however, rods cannot see things clearly. Several rod cells share a common nerve to the brain, something like the fingers on a hand sharing a common arm. When light strikes a rod the brain cannot tell precisely where to place that image on its mental screen. On the other hand, each of the 6-7 million cone cells has its own nerve—like a fist at the end of the arm. This allows for ultra clear vision. And cones have another advantage. When the light is intense enough they can differentiate colors. Rods can detect only contrasts (black and white being the easiest).

It is one thing to “have eyes and see not”, but another to not even know that we are blind! The disciples of Christ were in this condition.

The story is in Mark 8, where we read a dialog Christ had with His disciples shortly after miraculously feeding 4,000 people. After they left the area, the disciples realized they had kept only one loaf. When the Saviour heard them talking He said, “*Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.*” (verse 15). The disciples naturally thought He was addressing their mistake of bringing enough bread and were confused as to what Jesus meant.

This really concerned their Teacher.

Mark 8: 17-18 CEV **Why are you talking about not having any bread? Don't you understand? Are your minds still closed? Are your eyes blind and your ears deaf?** [Note the “eye” reference.]

To help them along, Jesus asked a couple questions. Their answers follow. (verses 19-20)

Q. How many baskets of leftovers did you pick up when I fed those five thousand people with only five small loaves of bread?

A. There were twelve baskets.

Q. And how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up when I broke seven small loaves of bread for those four thousand people?

A. Seven.

Two simple questions and two correct answers. But obviously the disciples still didn't get it.

Don't you know what I am talking about yet? (verse 21)

And with that Mark leaves the disciples and us scratching our heads and goes to another story.

Mark 8:22-25 **As Jesus and his disciples were going into Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch the man. Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and placed his hands on the blind man, he asked him if he could see anything. The man looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees walking around." Once again Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes and this time bade him look up, and the man's eyes were completely restored and he saw everything clearly.**

First, Jesus leads the sightless man out of Bethsaida. This town did not have a good reputation (Matthew 11:21-22).

The miracle began by Jesus spitting on the man's eyes. How disgusting! Why would He spit on the man? Spit is associated with rejection in the Bible (Numbers 12:13, Matthew 27:30, Revelation 3:16). Was something revolting about this man, some unconfessed sin that nauseated the pure soul of the Saviour? No, nothing is said to indicate that. But the context of this miracle being so close to the earlier conversation Jesus had with His disciples (Mark 8:17-21) makes it clear that He was concerned about their dullness of spiritual vision. They had just returned from a very successful evangelistic campaign of healing the sick and casting out demons (Luke 9) and were used to help feed the 4,000 (Mark 8), yet were unable to grasp the simple lesson of the leaven Jesus was trying to teach.

Luke 12:1 **Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**

DA 409 ***The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was the product of self-seeking. The glorification of themselves was the object of their lives. It was this that led them to pervert and misapply the Scriptures, and blinded them to the purpose of Christ's mission. This subtle evil even the disciples of Christ were in danger of cherishing...., though outwardly they had left all for Jesus' sake, had not in heart ceased to seek great things for themselves.***

Mark continues. After Jesus spit on the man's eyes he touched him, then asked if he could see anything. The man looked up and said, "People look like trees walking around." Apparently this part of the miracle activated rod vision because when Jesus touched him the second time the man saw everything clearly. Only cones can provide clear vision

This two-step miracle taught a very important lesson about we can view life.

[1] **Rod vision** knows nothing of colors and clarity is not its forte, though it is very sensitive, and can see things in even the dimmest of light. Seeing things in "black and white" is often compared to legalism, like the Pharisees had. Though they were expositors of the law, able to see nuances in the dimmest of light, even being perfectionists in works, they could not discern the Lawgiver, though standing right in front of them. This is not the type of vision the Creator wanted us to be content with.

[2] **Cone vision** can see things clearly and in full color— if light is bright enough. That's the catch. On this earth we have day and night. Sometimes God's presence is hid from us, as it was with Christ on the cross (Mark 15:33-34). When we have only the faintest beams to illuminate our path cones are not sufficient. This apparently is why Grace is connected so strongly with Faith (Ephesians 2:8), to get us through the dark periods of our life.

[3] God intended **Rods and Cones** to work together. Both complement each other.

Rods and Cones are a good illustration of Law and Grace. Law speaks of lords and servants and quality of works. Law's world is mostly one of contrasts--how closely the rule was obeyed or defied--, not color. Grace, on the other hand, addresses undeserved gifts, family-hood, and friendships. It's domain is filled with color, beautiful fragrances, music, laughter, and joy. Only through grace can we see the Plan of Redemption clearly.

The disciples weren't getting it. Though the Miracle-Worker was in their midst they were still fussing over one loaf of bread.

THE FOVEA CENTRALIS AND BABY VISION The lessons of "cone vision" go deeper. The light sensitive screen that contains these two types of vision cells is called the retina. One small area, a patch where the lens focuses the image for clearest vision, is called the fovea centralis. It is a tiny region populated only by cones. Rods aren't needed here for this is where light is concentrated the most and where clarity is essential. Cones can see everything rods can see, only more distinctly and in full color. They just need a lot more light. The further away we get from the fovea centralis and closer to the edge of the retina the more the rods will outnumber cones (see sidebar).

If cones and rods are a counterpart of grace and law an interesting concept is illustrated here. It is not law that most clearly reveals the beauty of God, but grace. Though obedience will characterize God's people, it is not their strictness to law that reaches the heart and brings sinners to repentance. It's the awareness of God's undeserved love expressed as mercy and grace (1John 4:19). When God wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, where did He instruct

Moses to place them? Out at the entrance on brazen pillars for all to see? No. They were to be placed in a golden ark, under the Mercy Seat, in the most beautiful part of the whole sanctuary-- the Most Holy Place. Though Law is the core of all government, in God's kingdom it is not to be made prominent. It's purpose is to get our attention as sinners and lead us to the only One who will graciously remedy our miserable fate (Gal 3:24).

Say you are enjoying a beautiful summer day riding your bike. You are on a main road and come to an intersection with stop signs only for the side streets. Your attention is focused on a car coming toward you farther up the road, when suddenly, in the "corner of your eye" your brain detects some action directly to your right, something moving very fast, faster than it should for approaching a stop sign. But the brain doesn't have enough information. It can't tell what the object is. Quickly it directs you to turn your eyes and focus on the fast-moving whatever. Ah! It's a motorcycle and it's not intending to stop! You are ordered to brake immediately! If you hadn't you would have peddled directly into its path.

Infants begin life with only rod vision. It takes about one year for cones to mature so the fovea centralis isn't functioning in newborns. This is why they don't look directly at you. With the first healing the blind man could see. But he couldn't see clearly. His vision would still be handicapped, as is the infant's. Seeing everything in "black and white" by highly sensitized rods is not God's sole purpose for sight. He wants us to see everything clearly and in beautiful colors. That's only possible through grace. But grace needs plenty of Light.

CONCLUSION

Rods are not sensitive to color, but are used like the law, to get our attention and point us to where we can focus on the object, where only cones abound. When light is strong enough we can see clearly and in full color.

When our attention is on works, or self-seeking, pride can grow and disfigure God's character. Jesus knew if His disciples could grasp the Father's unconditional love for them it would make all the difference in their world. To illustrate His concern Jesus healed a blind man twice. The first time, using spit, He pictured how the disciples perceived life. The second time showed what grace can do-- to help us see clearly the beauties of Redemption.

Mark 8 and the Laodicean message both speak of blindness, Christ's spitting, and two kinds of vision. But the Laodicean message includes the remedy, the eyesalve.

FW 23 "They need the heavenly eyesalve that they might discern with astonishment the utter worthlessness of creature merit to earn the wages of eternal life."

If we are "legally blind", if God's Law catches our attention easier than His Love, if life and God's Word appear confusing, gloomy or colorless, if the kingdom of heaven does not excite us and we struggle with pride and self-sufficiency, then we have a problem with our "grace receptors". They need more Light. We can get more by inviting Jesus into our life (John 12:46), letting Truth be our guide (John 3:21), and showing love for those in need about us (1John 2:10).

If we are content just seeing the way we do, here's something to think about. There will come a day when light and glory, beauty and joy will be the norm. Darkness and those who love it will be no more. We choose today what we want tomorrow.

If you want to get an idea what sight might be like with mostly "rod vision", do this interesting experiment:

Stretch your arm straight out in front of you with your fingers pointing up. Look at your index finger. Focus on your fingernail. See the shades of pink, the lines around the nail, and maybe even a little dirt under the nail?

Now, without moving your eyes, move your finger to the side a tiny bit, maybe a half an inch, so it is not directly in the focusing part of the retina, and notice what changed. You still can see colors and the shape of the finger (remember, cones are scattered throughout the whole retina), but gone are the shades of pink, the sharp lines, and even the dirt!

Continue keeping your eyes fixed straight ahead and move your hand further to the side. Notice the increased loss of clarity. Finally, when your hand is straight out to your side, at the very edge of vision we call the "corner of our eye", nearly all color and sharpness of vision is lost. You can't even tell how many fingers are sticking up! This only approximates what sight would be like without cones, for even here a few cones are scattered around the edges!