

Self-Imposed Blindness

Joe Slater

Jesus' disciples asked Him why He spoke to the crowd in parables. His reply: *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given"* (Matthew 13:11). On the surface that sounds like Calvinistic "unconditional election" – certain ones receive special favor, the rest don't, and that's just the way it is.

Truth is a bit more complicated. The Lord didn't act arbitrarily, randomly, or unconditionally in determining who would and who wouldn't know the truth. In fact, Jesus said this situation fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which said, *"Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive"* (Isaiah 6:9). The next sentence tells **why** they didn't understand or perceive: *"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts . . ."* (Matthew 13:15 quoting Isaiah 6:10). It's interesting that the text of Isaiah reads as a command, *"shut their eyes,"* but Jesus makes it clear that the sinful people shut their own eyes. Paul's quotation of the same passage in Acts 28:27 does the same thing.

God didn't deliberately shut their eyes and then blame them for being unable to see. Such would be the act of an unreasonable and cruel tyrant. But the fact is, they hardened their own hearts, shut their own eyes, and stopped their own ears.

God *"desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). He will neither force us to understand nor hinder us. We can open our spiritual eyes or close them. If we keep them closed, our blindness is self-imposed.

The Problem With Envy

Have you ever looked at another person's possessions, happiness, or success and said, "I wish that was me."? If we're honest, we'll admit we have all said it at one time or another. The problem with envy is that when we compare ourselves to others, it can cause us to be dissatisfied or even miserable with our present status.

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher is quoted as saying, "Envy is pain at the sight of another's good fortune, stirred by those who have what we ought to have." God's word does not fall short when it comes to warnings against the sin of envy, here's a sample:

- Envy Caused the First Murder (Genesis 4:5)
- Joseph's Brothers Envied Him Because of His Dreams (Genesis 37:1-11)
- King Saul Envied David Because of His Victories (1 Samuel 18:6-9)
- Don't Envy Evildoers and Sinners (Psalm 37:1)
- Envy is Rottenness to the Bones (Proverbs 14:30)
- Envy of Another's Skill and Hard Work is Vanity (Ecclesiastes 4:4)
- The Chief Priest Envied Jesus, Delivering Him to Pilate (Mark 15:9)
- The Jews Envied Paul's Successful Preaching (Acts 15:45)
- Christian Love Never Envies (1 Corinthians 13:4)
- Christians Should Never Envy Each Other (Galatians 5:26)

The opposite of envy is rejoicing at the blessings and success experienced by others (1 Corinthians 12:26), literally *"Rejoicing with those who rejoice"* (Romans 12:15). We must congratulate and express our happiness at the good fortune of others, while remaining content and godly which within itself is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

The Great Commission bids us make disciples, not merely believers. Jesus was out for disciples, not "joiners."

--Vance Havner

Branding A Calf

There was a time when there were very few fences in America. Much of the land in what is now the western United States was open rangeland until the 1890s. Ranchers would allow their animals to wander about most of the year. Once per year the various ranches would send representatives to round up the cattle and separate the herds belonging to the ranches. Unbranded cattle would be branded. But how did they know what brand to place on the unbranded calves? The process was simple.

Theodore Roosevelt owned two ranches in Dakota Territory in the 1880s. He describes these roundups in his autobiography. He states, "Each calf was branded with the brand of the cow it was following."

It was simple. It was obvious. Might it be that occasionally for some reason a calf followed the wrong cow and so ended up branded wrongly and sent to the wrong ranch? It was rare, but I suppose it may have happened occasionally.

People are not branded like cattle these days, thankfully. So how do we know which people belong to which owner? It is simple. We watch them. Those following Satan's herd belong to Satan. They may deny it. They may take offence at the identification. But the habit of following Satan's herd invites the identification. If we don't want to be identified with Satan, if we don't want to be marked with his brand, and sent to his ranch, we had better stop following his cows.

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

"Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright" (Proverbs 20:11).

--Thayer Salisbury (Eswatini, Africa)