



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 19
Matthew 6:22-23: Topic 18

Study By
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Greek NT

6.22 Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὁ ὀφθαλμός. ἐὰν οὖν ᾗ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ἀπλοῦς, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται· 6.23 ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ποιηρὸς ᾗ, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται. εἰ οὖν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν, τὸ σκότος πόσον.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

22 Aus dem Auge leuchtet das Innere des Menschen: Wenn dein Auge klar blickt, ist deine ganze Erscheinung hell; 23 wenn dein Auge durch Neid oder Habgier getrübt ist, ist deine ganze Erscheinung finster. – Wie groß muss diese Finsternis sein, wenn statt des Lichtes in dir nur Dunkelheit ist!«

NRSV

22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; 23 but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

NLT

22 “Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. 23 But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, how deep that darkness will be!

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

This rather different expression offers insight into discipleship by way of an intensive figurative expression that can be challenging to understand. This saying here in Matthew has a close parallel in Luke 11:34-36,² which is important to study along with the Matthean text. The picturesque expression of spiritual illumination common to both texts reflects the frequent nature of such ways of presenting ideas. At the surface level, the meaning appears simple. Without a healthy eye one can't see; blindness dominates. The point seemingly rests on portraying the eye as a window of the 'body' that allows outside light into the house. Yet, as the exegesis below will explore, another point may very well be what Jesus was aiming for in this expression. In the context, Jesus clearly isn't talking about a person's physical eye. The saying is pointing to a spiritual reality.

Thus the challenge to the Bible study is to understanding the spiritual point of an expression based on a simple physical reality. Figurative language in biblical interpretation often becomes the more challenging scripture expressions to understand with clarity and correctness. At the heart of such language is a comparison between a common everyday life experience and a spiritual truth built off this. As such the ancient parable represents the same kind of language, but usually with more elaborate details in the everyday life experience provided. Thus the additional interpretive principles necessary for interpreting parables have critical application here, in certain aspects.³ The expression both here in Matthew and also in Luke falls into the category of “Parabolic Sayings.” Central to the additional steps in proper biblical interpretation is the determination of the *tertium comparationis*, that is, the point of the comparison. This means first that the Bible student must accurately understand the idea of the everyday life expression in the context of the ancient world, both at the non-religious and at the religious levels of meaning. Then, using the signals of meaning inherent to parabolic language, a careful assessment of possible spiritual meanings follows. This is the *tertium comparationis* of the text. Because more than one possibility usually surfaces, both caution and humility in reaching conclusions are critical.

In the *history of interpretation* of Mt. 6:22-23 along with Lk. 11:34-36, a variety of viewpoints have arisen. Ulrich Luz in the Hermeneia commentary series presents a good summation of the interpretive history:⁴

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²NRSV: “34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. 35 Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. 36 If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.”

³For a detailed procedure for interpreting parables see Lorin L. Cranford, “Exegeting Parables,” cranfordville.com.

⁴Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 1-7 : A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, Rev. ed., Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 330–337. Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew*

One can see two main tendencies: (a) The text is internalized and related to the correct attitude, the inner relationship to one's possessions. (b) The text is expanded and then becomes the model for different basic human choices in life; it speaks of possessions only along with other matters.

a. The *internalization* of the text regularly begins with vv. 22–23. Following the widespread ancient comparison of reason with the eye,⁴ the “light in you” has been interpreted as reason (νοῦς).⁵⁷ Probably closer to Matthew's sense is the likewise frequently found interpretation of the inner light as the person's heart.⁶⁸ However, this interpretation is associated with late antiquity's dualism and hostility toward the body. Darkness becomes identical with the carnal senses,⁷⁹ and the decisive question is then whether the human heart is a prisoner of the earth, which *eo ipso* is impure, or of heaven, which *eo ipso* is pure.⁸⁰ One is asked whether one's own heart has the “light of faith” (*lumen fidei*)⁹¹ or, stated volitionally, whether one does something “in a good spirit” (*bono animo*) or “with pure intention” (*pura intentione*). Later the idea of the conscience also appears in connection with this passage.¹⁰² Now the conclusion is that “a good conscience justifies every action.” Or, with reference to possessions: “The orientation of our life toward God” can be verified not only in renouncing but also in acquiring possessions.¹¹³ If one thus begins with vv. 22–23 and internalizes the Matthean demand, an interpretation of v. 24 widely held throughout the entire history of the church becomes understandable: mammon means not money but attachment to money, covetousness, and greed.¹²⁴ “It is one thing ... to have riches, another ... to serve riches.”¹³⁵ The rich man who does not have his heart set on riches is happy to give his possessions away, but of course in moderation so that enough is left for his family.¹⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas and Zwingli agree on the practical consequences: it is a question of moderation.¹⁵⁷ For us, however, the question is: Do the central verses 22–23 justify internalizing Jesus' demand this way?

b. Parallel to this interpretation is a tendency to *expand* the text. It was often made possible with v. 24 by quoting only the “proverb” of v. 24a–c and omitting the application to mammon in v. 24d. It happened as early as *Gos. Thom.* 47, where it is preceded by two other images (no one can mount two horses; no one can bend two bows) and the saying about old and new wine is added (Mark 2:21–22^{16*} pars.). No explanation is given: the initiate applies the saying to the incompatibility of gnosis and the material world. Then in the second century the hostile Celsus indicates that the saying was applied to the Christian faith's claim to exclusivity against heathen religions.¹⁷⁸ Tertullian interprets it ascetically in terms of the incompatibility between God and theater or God and marriage.¹⁸⁹ In a later period the allegorical interpretation opened up new areas of ethical application. At the same time, however, it removes the text so far from its literal meaning that the latter becomes only one possible interpretation among others. Rust, moth, and thieves can be interpreted allegorically, for example, to mean pride, envy, and false teachers.¹⁹⁰ Allegorizing makes it possible to circumvent the precise meaning of the text. “One must understand that not only about money

I-7 : A Commentary on Matthew I-7, Rev. ed., Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 330–337.

⁵Widespread since Justin *Apol.* 1.15.16. Examples: Theodore of Heraclea, frg. 45; Cyril of Alexandria, frg. 77 = Reuss, 69, 176; Dionysius bar Salibi, 176; Thomas Aquinas *Lectura* no. 616; Erasmus *Paraphrasis* 39.

⁶For sources see Knabenbauer 1.332. Καρδία is suggested by v. 21*.

⁷*Opus Imperfectum* 15 = 721.

⁸Augustine *Serm. Dom.* 2.13 (44).

⁹*Ibid.*, 2.13 (46); Strabo on 6.22 = 104.

¹⁰“Here he wants to have commended each of us to his conscience” (Luther 2.174). Cf. also, e.g., Brenz, 337: “Si opera alioqui bona fiunt mala, ex malo corde.”

¹¹Quotations from Bossuet 1.52 (29th day): “La bonne intention sanctifie toutes les actions de l'âme”; Adolf Schlatter, *Die christliche Ethik* (4th ed.; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1961) 427.

¹²Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 4.30.4 = ANF 2.415.

¹³*Opus Imperfectum* 16 = 722; similarly already John Chrysostom 21.1 = PG 57.294–96, esp. 295; Jerome on 6:24. In this way not even David served mammon (Luther, Sermon no. 71 from 1528, WA 27.343).

¹⁴Nicely developed by Wesley, *Sermons*, 206: caring for children and one's own household is a “duty,” but there is a limit: “the simple necessities of life, but not delicacies or lavish provisions.”

¹⁵On 6:19–21* Thomas Aquinas (*Lectura* no. 611) distinguishes between *necessarium* and *superflua*, whereby depending on the situation *necessarium* means something different for a king than for a “normal” person. Zwingli (237) thinks that Christ commanded “modum ... quondam in ... temporariis rebus” and makes himself an advocate of a “media via.” His definition of the Christian rich persons is classic and useful: “Dives est, qui satis habet. Et hic habet satis, qui modum servat.”

¹⁶“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”¹

Bible:Mk 2:21–22 (NRSV)

¹⁷Origen *Cels.* 7.68, 70; 8.2, 5, 8, 15; cf. Brennecke, “Niemand,” 161–63.

¹⁸Tertullian *Spect.* 26 = FC 40.100; *Ad uxorem* 2.3 = ACW 13.28; cf. Brennecke, “Niemand,” 165–66.

¹⁹E.g., in Rabanus Maurus, 834.

but about all passions.” The treasure on earth can be not only money but also the belly, feasting, the theater, sex. “Every individual is a slave where he is defeated.”²⁰¹ Mammon is then not only gold but “every beautiful figure on earth.”²¹² Against such widespread tendencies it is amazing when Jacob of Sarug (ca²². 500) quite sharply describes service to mammon as *the* form of idolatry with which the devil operates after the old gods no longer appealed to the masses that had become Christian.²³³

Thus much caution should be exercised here in drawing detailed conclusions about the precise meaning of the text. Numerous mistakes have been made over the centuries largely by failure to serious look at all of the angles of interpretation necessary for drawing solid conclusions.

Historical Context:

The historical setting for this pericope revolves around the figurative meaning of the ‘eye’ and also its comparison to an ancient lamp.²⁴ Different levels of ancient meaning have been uncovered. Ancient Greek philosophers developed elaborate explanations of how the eye functioned and typically linked the eye to ‘knowing’ by use of the idea of light.²⁵ Hellenistic Judaism seems to have been influenced by some of this thinking. The patterns of understanding in the Old Testament, although without the ancient effort to explain the function physiologically, did move along somewhat similar general understandings. But Jewish thinking closely linked the eye to the moral and to character.²⁶ The defining of lamp in v. 22a with the light ‘in you’ in v. 23b especially underscores the traditional Jewish understanding of character and moral behavior. John Nolland²⁷ has provided a helpful summary of this background:



Taken alone, the opening sentence need be no more than a metaphorical way of saying that the eye enables a person to see, that is, to be ‘illuminated’ in relation to what is external to oneself. But ancient thought generally supposed that the human eye was quite literally a source of light, and the thought in vv. 22–23 is clarified and unified by assuming that the metaphorical construction involved appeal to imagery based on this ancient view. Sight was understood to function by means of a flow of light from the eyes out to the object in view; the light from the eyes was thought to merge with the light coming from the object (with illumination by, e.g., the sun) and then to flow or bounce back to the eye and to penetrate through the

²⁰Jerome on 6:21.

²¹Cramer 1.48 (Theodoros Monachos).

²²a. ca. *circa*, approximately

²³Jacob of Sarug, *A Poem on the Fall of the Idols*, 390–580 = BKV I/16.175–83.

²⁴“The *lychnos* is a lamp, originally an open bowl, then a closed lamp in various forms, usually put on a stand to give better light, the *lychnia* being the stand. Both words are common in the LX^x (cf. the seven-branched candelabra, a *lychnia* with seven *lychnoi*). The lamp is a common metaphor in the OT. It denotes length of life (2 Sam. 21:17), the source of divine help (Job 29:3), and the law (Ps. 119:105). The lamp of the wicked will be put out (Job 18:6). In the NT Jesus makes figurative use of the fact that to give its light a lamp must be put on a stand. In Mt. 5:15 this seems to suggest that the disciples must give open witness, although a reference to Jesus’ own ministry is not excluded. In Lk. 11:34 Jesus calls the eye the lamp of the body; we must be open to the light of the gospel if we are to know full health. The exhortation in Lk. 12:35 presents the burning lamp as a symbol of readiness. The woman in Lk. 15:8 lights a lamp in her search for the lost coin, a token of her great anxiety to find it. In Jn. 5:35 Jesus honors the Baptist by calling him a burning and shining lamp; he cannot be called the light itself (cf. 1:8) but he has given faithful witness to it. Rev. 11:4 describes the two witnesses as *lychniai* (cf. Zech. 4:2, 11), while the seven churches are seven golden *lychniai* in 1:12–13 etc. (cf. Zech. 4 and Mt. 5:15), and the Lamb himself is the lamp of the heavenly city in 21:23. Heb. 9:2 refers to the temple lampstand, and 2 Pet. 1:19 calls the prophetic word a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns.” [Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 542–543. S.V. W. Michaelis, “*lychnos* [lamp], *lychnia* [lampstand]”]

²⁵For a very detailed, and somewhat technical discussion of this background, see Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)*, Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 437–453.

²⁶“In Judaism ‘eye’ had always been given a metaphorical connotation. A person’s character and moral quality are reflected in the eyes.” [Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7*, Rev. ed., Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 332]

²⁷John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 300–302.

eye into the person, where sight was registered.²⁸ As the lamp is an image for the eye, so the eye in turn is an image for the human capacity to absorb from what is available externally.²⁹

Thus the 'eye' is the way outside illumination finds its way into the body and is grasped. But the inner illumination of the eye is critical for this illumination to occur. Inner illumination is the thinking / understanding capability of the individual. It is not Reason as was understood early in the interpretative history. Nor is it the heart when heart is understood as emotions, something not found in ancient literature. Nolland makes a valid point by noting the inclusiveness of the image so that the inner light in the eye includes the interior aspect of human existence that knows, understands, values, and commits to.

Literary Aspects:

Again, the literary aspects of these two verses play an important role in the interpretive process. And so attention needs to be given in order to lead to proper conclusions.

Literary Form:

The genre of vv. 22-23 is mixed. The initial statement in v. 22a has the form of a proverb. The following statements in vv. 22b-23 reflect a commentary elaboration on the proverbial expression in v. 22a. Two comments are given in antithetical parallel form, first the positive and then the negative. These are cast in the third class conditional sentence form used often to set up a hypothetical situation. A conclusion is drawn from this in v. 22b in the form of a first class conditional sentence in Greek. This makes an assumption of reality, in contrast to the previous two hypothetical situations.

Literary Setting:

Most modern commentators have correctly noticed the closeness of the three expressions in vv. 19-21, 22-23, and 24. But then they tend to lump all together, and often include vv. 25-34 as well, under the heading of materialism and worldly concern. In this approach important insights are blocked and made impossible to grasp.

The approach suggested by Bornkamm and adopted with modifications in our studies opens the way to a much better understanding of the context of vv. 22-23. It stands as the second of the six amplifications of the six petitions of the model prayer, as is charted out in the diagram to the right.

Just as the first petition in v. 9b asking God to make His name holy is expanded by vv. 19-21, so the second petition for God's kingdom to come in v. 10a is expanded in vv. 22-23.

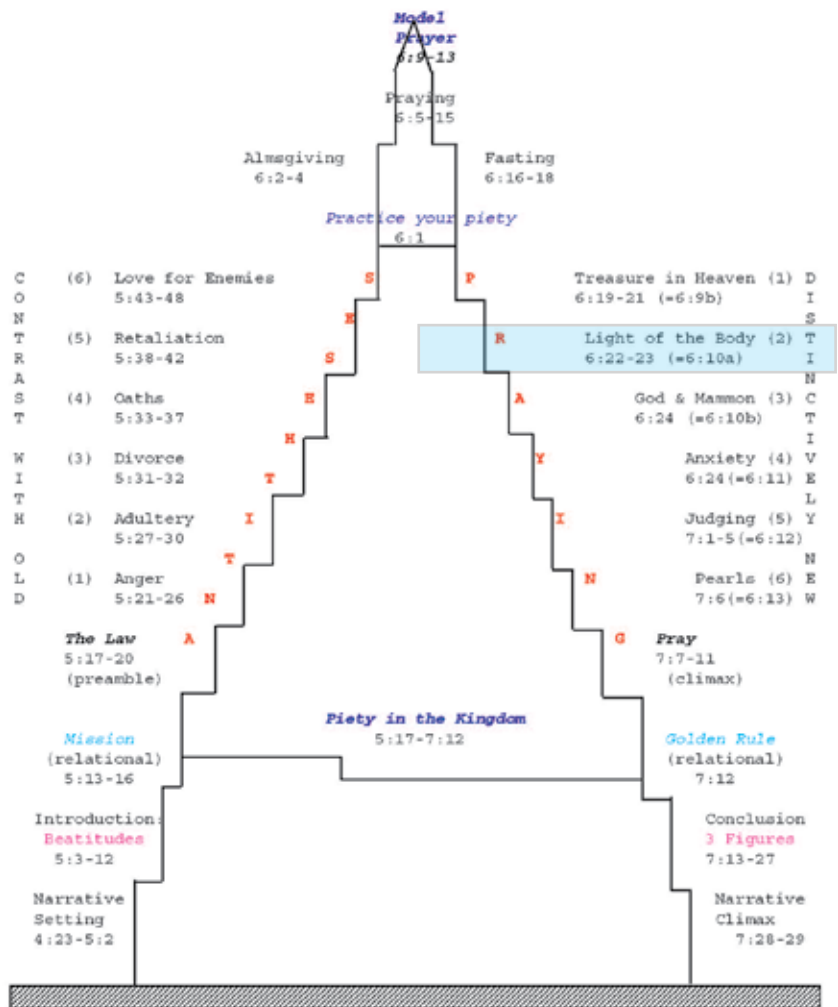
"Your kingdom come" (v. 10a)

This petition obligates us to:

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lein L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

²⁸Something like a sonic bounce or radar system. See, e.g., Plato, *Tim.* 45B-46A. Allison, 'The Eye', 61-83, conveniently documents the range of Greek views and confirms that ancient Jewish sources also assume that vision operates on the basis of light originating from the eye.

²⁹No particular anthropological theory is involved (e.g., it is not the soul or the conscience or some other specific dimension of the human entity which is privileged to be the channel of insight).

will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (vv. 22-23)

The request for God to take over complete control in one’s life and world carries with it the obligation of spiritually healthy insight that can clearly discern between good and evil. Living in spiritual and moral darkness rather than in the illumination of God makes the petition meaningless.

Literary Structure:

The block diagram below, based on the Greek text, visually highlights the thought flow of these two verses.

97 ^{6:22} **The lamp of the body is the eye.**

Therefore

if your eye be single,

98 **the entire body will be illuminated;**

^{6:23} but

if your eye be evil,

99 **the entire body will be darkness.**

Therefore

if the light is the darkness in you,

100 **the darkness is very great.**

From the diagram, one can clearly notice the literary flow of ideas from proverb (#97) to commentary (#s 98-100). Statement 97 is the maxim expression in a proverb form. Statements 98 and 99 form the antithetical parallelism defining opposite scenarios. Then statement 100 draws the conclusion of how disastrous it is when darkness prevails.

Exegesis of the Text:

Proverb, v. 22a: “The eye is the lamp of the body” (Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματος ἐστὶν ὁ ὀφθαλμός.).

The text begins with the proverb that was relatively common in the ancient world, and especially in Jewish circles. The association of the eye with light is very frequent, although the linkage of the eye to a lamp is much less common in Jewish circles while more frequent in the Greek literature.³⁰ This connection migrated into Jewish writings through Hellenistic Jewish writers such as Philo.

Clearly the expression is speaking of a ‘spiritual’ eye and not a physical eye. This eye becomes a lamp for the entire body. In what sense then is this true? The lamp is a self-contained light, not a mirror or reflection of light. It produces light. The tendency of modern commentators is to treat the image as though it were a mirror, and this is based upon modern understandings of how the eye works by taking in light from the outside and then converting it into mental perceptions. But as Davies and Allison persuasively argue, interpretations of this expression based upon this modern perspective are not correct. The ancient understanding of the functioning of the eye is the foundation for correct understanding. This is made clear from the good / bad eyes below (vv. 22b-23a) and the shift to the light inside the individual (v. 23b). The six ancient Jewish sources where the eye is compared to a lamp add additional confirmation.³¹

Then what is the significance of the comparison? Very likely the point is that the individual’s ability to perceive spiritual reality is critical to spiritual health throughout one’s life. The light of God comes from outside, to be sure. But the inner light of spiritual perception is necessary before this light from God

³⁰Pre-modern people tended to believe that the eyes contain a fire or light, and that this fire or light is what makes sight possible (see Allison (v)). Ancient Jews were no exception. They spoke of ‘the light of the eyes’ (Prov 15:30 MT; Tob 10:5; 11:13 **8**), of eyes becoming dimmed or darkened (Gen 27:1; 48:10; Deut 34:7; Lam 5:17; T. Benj 4:2; Josephus, *Ant.* 8:268; *b Ber.* 16b), and of God ‘enlightening’ or ‘brightening’ the eyes (Ezra 9:8; Bar 1:12; cf. 1 Sam 14:24–30 MT; T. Gad. 5:7; *b Yeb.* 63a; *b Meg.* 12b). They imagined that the eye was like the sun, both being senders of rays (2 Sam 12:11; Ecclus 23:19; 3 Bar 8; Jos. Asen 14:9), and they told stories in which the light or fire of the eyes actually became so intense that it was visible (Dan 10:6; Rev 1:14; 2:18; 19:12; 1 Eⁿ 106:2, 5, 10; 2 Eⁿ 1:5; 3 Eⁿ 1:7–8; 9:4; 25:2–3, 6–7; Par. Jer. 7:3; *b B. Meṣ.* 59b; *b Šabb.* 33b).

For the eye as a lamp, see Empedocles, frag. 84 (= D.-K I, 342:4–9 [31 B 84]); Dan 10:6; Zech 4; T. Jo^b 18:3; 2 Eⁿ 42:1 A; 3 Eⁿ 35:2; *b Šabb.* 151b. (cf. Theocritus, *Idylls* 24:18–19; Theophrastus, *De sensu* 26, quoting Alcmaeon; Aristotle, *De sensu* 437a 22–6).” [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 635.]

³¹Empedocles, frag. 84 (= D.-K I, 342:4–9 [31 B 84]); Dan 10:6; Zech 4; T. Jo^b 18:3; 2 Eⁿ 42:1 A; 3 Eⁿ 35:2; *b Šabb.* 151b.

takes on meaning and produces consequence within a believer's life. Without this 'inner light' burning, no meaning can be given to the light coming from outside. This understanding fits naturally with the language below.

Antithetical parallelism, vv. 22b-23a: "So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness" (ἐὰν οὖν ᾗ ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου ἀπλοῦς, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται· ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου πονηρὸς ᾗ, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται.).

In this first section of commentary expansion of the proverb, two antithetical parallel statements are set up. The 'if-clauses' set up two opposite scenarios regarding **the condition of the eye**. These revolve around whether this spiritual eye is 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' (ἀπλοῦς / πονηρὸς). The NRSV use of healthy / unhealthy to translate the two Greek terms reflects an effort to produce a sensible English expression, not a literal translation of the Greek words. The huge variety of translation patterns³² revolves largely around whether to use terms based on the health of the physical eye or the moral tone of the spiritual eye. Barclay Newman and Philip Stine³³ provide a helpful summation of the translation issues present here:



Sound is the word used by most translations, but the precise meaning is difficult to determine. By itself it contrasts with the Greek term for "twofold," as if to say "singlefold." It thus has the idea of simplicity, straightforwardness, or purity, and depending upon context it can mean "single," "simple," or "sincere," that is, with no ulterior motive. In this context it contrasts with *not sound*, which is literally "if your eye is bad or evil." In this sense the two expressions can describe eyes that are medically in good or in bad condition, the *sound* eye being "clear" or "healthy," and the one that is *not sound* being unhealthy. But it is clear that in this context the terms are used figuratively for something else.

Since an "evil eye" is a Jewish metaphor for stinginess, some scholars argue that this "good eye" fits the metaphor for generosity. Note that in 20:15 the expression "evil eye" clearly means "greedy" (TE^{34v} "jealous"). The context of verses 19–21 favors this understanding here. Br^{35c} translates in a way that retains both the figure and this meaning: "sound and generous ... diseased and grudging."

Other scholars point out that in the Septuagint this word and its cognates represent a Hebrew word which means "singleness of purpose" or "undivided loyalty," especially toward God. And the Aramaic counterpart to the Hebrew may mean both "undivided commitment" and "health." The passage is then understood to mean that, just as blindness makes a person's entire life one of darkness, so distraction by earthly riches blinds a person to God and leads to total darkness.

Most likely the focus on the moral tone of the terms ἀπλοῦς / πονηρὸς is preferable, since it is more consistent with the figurative meaning of eye in this text.

The 'then-clause' sections state the consequences of the two possible conditions of the eye. *The positive side* is "your whole body will be full of light" (ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται). The adjective 'full of light,' depending on whether inward emphasis.³⁶ Here the inward the eye working well as a lamp, the stresses that one's entire life is The healthy eye is able to receive throughout the body, i.e., one's life. *The negative side* is "your whole body will be full of darkness" (ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται). Here being πονηρὸς.³⁷ Again with the



³²Various translations adopt differing patterns of expression for ἀπλοῦς / πονηρὸς. NRSV, TNIV: **healthy / unhealthy**; NASB 95: **clear / bad**; ESV: **healthy / bad**; NIV, NLT, NfV, NKJV, HCSB: **good / bad**; KJV, ASV, D-R: **single / evil**; NCV: **good / evil**; GNT: **sound / no good**; RSV: **sound / not sound**; Message: **open your eyes wide in wonder and belief / live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust**; Net Bible: **healthy / diseased**; Cotton Patch: **in focus / not in focus**; EU: **gesund / krank**; LB 1912: **einfältig / ein Schalk**; ZB: **lauter / böse**; Courant: **en bon / malades**; Vul, CVul, BSvul: **simplex / nequam**.

³³Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS helps for translators; UBS handbook series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 180–182.

^{34v}EV TEV Today's English Version

^{35c}rc Brc Barclay

³⁶φωτεινός, ἢ, ὄν: a full of light: 14.51; b bright: 14.50. [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 2, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 261.]

³⁷This Greek adjective has a variety of meanings that are reflected in New Testament usage, as is indicated in the Page 6 of Bergpredigt Study

moral tone chiefly in view, then the adjective σκοτεινόν, which simply means ‘dark’ or ‘in darkness,’³⁸ stresses the fact that one’s entire life is being lived in spiritual darkness. Newmann - Stine provide a helpful interpretive summary:³⁹

Matthew frequently uses parts of the body figuratively: verses 21–23 speak of the heart and eye, while 5:28, 30 speak of the eye, heart, and hand, 6:3 speaks of the hand, and 15:11 of the mouth. As the eye goes, so goes the entire person. If the eye is sound, one can see the light; if it is not sound, the entire individual walks in darkness. This means that if one’s eye for God is darkened, the total person gropes around in darkness. If a person lacks the ability to perceive the presence of God, how terribly dark it is!

Conclusion, v. 23b: “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (εἰ οὖν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν, τὸ σκότος πόσον.).

This statement draws a conclusion (then; οὖν) from the previous set of statements. The ‘if-clause’ stresses the eye as a lamp with the phrase “the light in you.” In the Greek expression the idea goes a little differently, and literally is “the light the in you darkness is” (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν). Even more stress is placed on the inward light, i.e., the eye as lamp, being darkness rather than light. The point is that the inner light, instead of facilitating genuine spiritual illumination, produces rather spiritual darkness. The second class Greek protasis nature of the ‘if-clause’ assumes such is happening; no hypothetical possibility is being treated, rather, assumed reality is the point.

The conclusion to such a situation is “how great is the darkness” (τὸ σκότος πόσον). Here, Luke’s use of the Jesus tradition adds further understanding (Lk. 11:34–36, NRSV), in particular vv. 35–36:

34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. 35 Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. 36 If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.”

Davies - Allison offer helpful insights:⁴⁰

With this paradoxical exclamation the parable passes from the theoretical to the personal: γνῶθι σεαυτόν. The listener is called to self-examination. Am I filled with light or with darkness? Is my eye good, or is it bad? These queries, raised by the paraenetic conclusion of Mt 6:22–23, make it evident that our passage belongs to a distinct class of synoptic logia, the class of those sayings that move one to ponder the relation between outward acts and inward states. See Lk 6:43–4 = Mt 7:16–20; 12:33; Lk 6:45 = Mt 12:34–5; Mt 23:27 (cf. Lk 11:44); Mk 7:15–23. The proof of right religion resides in deeds, for that which is within is the source of that without (‘faith without works is dead’). This is why the ὀφθαλμὸς ἀπλοῦς and inner light are found together and why the ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρὸς and inner darkness entail one another.

Few greater tragedies are possible than for an individual to live in utter spiritual darkness. In Jesus’ day, the scribes and Pharisees stand as the prime example of what Jesus was warning against. Their assumption was that their ‘inner light’ was working well to give them clear understanding of the light of God from the Torah. But sadly with Jesus’ repeated exposure of their spiritual blindness they were living in deep spiritual darkness and thus unable to grasp the Light of God being presented to them by Christ.

Praying in light or darkness?

Most commentators push the interpretation of not only vv. 22–23 but the two pericopes on either side, vv. 19–21 and v. 24, in the direction of a threefold warning against worldliness. But this misses the important connection to the Model Prayer petition, “Your kingdom come,” as a commentary expansion. When we ask God to take control in our lives, we must be positioned to grasp the spiritual light of His coming into our lives with complete authority over us. Through the Word of God in scripture we can mentally understand how this works. But the spiritual eye is more than our mind. It is spiritual wisdom and spiritual sensitivity to God along with openness to Him and teachableness from Him through life

Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon: πονηρός, ἄ, ὄν: a wicked: 88.110; b worthless: 65.27; c guilty: 88.314; d be sick: 23.149; πονηρός: units: ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρὸς, a jealous: 88.165; b stingy: 57.108; ὁ πονηρὸς, the Evil One 12.35; πνεῦμα πονηρόν; evil spirit 12.38 [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 2, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 202–203.]

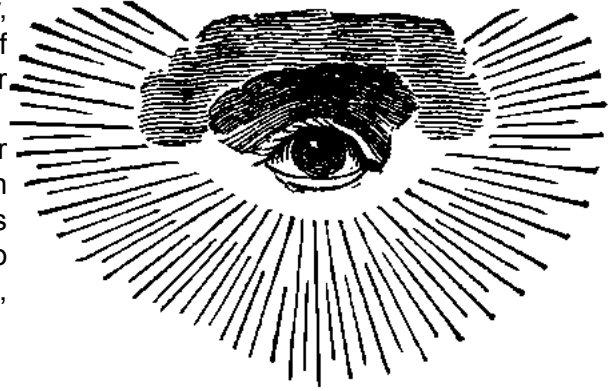
³⁸σκοτεινός, ἦ, ὄν: pertaining to being in a state of darkness—‘dark, in darkness.’ μὴ ἔχον μέρος τι σκοτεινόν ‘not having any part dark’ Lk 11:36. In some languages ‘dark’ may be most satisfactorily expressed as ‘without light.’” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 2, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 224.]

³⁹Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS helps for translators; UBS handbook series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 181.

⁴⁰W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 639.

experience. If then our spiritual eye is working properly, our entire life will be filled with the divine illumination of how to live in the fullness of God's presence and under His leadership over our lives.

Thus our prayer for God to come in His reign over us becomes answerable only to the extent that we open up our lives to grasp all that this will mean day by day as disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven. If we are not open to this divine illumination, i.e., our eye is not working right, then our petition has little meaning.



2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) What condition is your 'spiritual eye' in?

- 2) How open are you to God's full control of your life?

- 3) Do you pray with an 'eye open'? Or with a 'bad eye' closed?