

### **364 “If thine eye be single”**

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great [is] that darkness!” (Matthew 6.22-23, KJV).

The eye is one of the main God-created portals through which influences from outside pass into our minds and memories. We know from Scripture, and no doubt from our own experience too, that through the eye we can be pitched into strong temptation, as with Eve over the fruit, or Achan over the spoils of war, or David over Bathsheba, or Amnon over Tamar (Genesis 3 / Joshua 7 / II Kings 11 & 13). Even if we do withstand temptation from images set before us, those that we do receive remain in our memories thereafter, whether we want them there or not.

So these words spoken by the Lord Jesus about “the singleness of the eye” are as timely as ever today, especially as we enter this season when film and television will have greater influence than usual in millions of households. Such visual media have their plus side, but of course they have another side too which can easily prevail if we let it. A few remarks in this Reflection can thus remind us of the main “media agendas” which drive what is presented before our eyes, and of some simple steps we can take to ensure that our eyes can remain as “single” as possible when opening ourselves up to film and television images.

In a Greek Lexicon the Greek word translated “single” in Matthew 6.22 (KJV) is defined as – “simple, single, nothing complicated or confused, good, fulfilling its office, sound”. In the previous verses the Lord has just spoken of our need to build up treasure in heaven rather than on earth, so these two lessons are inter-related. As Christ’s redeemed children, the members of the Good Shepherd’s flock of “faithful sheep”, our priorities are to be heaven-wards rather than earth-wards, and a key part of our keeping those priorities rightly aligned involves guarding our eyes.

For a start, we do well to remember that within the film and television industry there is intense competition to gain our attention, our allegiance, and our money. To achieve those aims, the bounds of what is deemed “acceptable” in our society these days go far, far beyond the divinely-established rights and wrongs of morality as laid down for us so clearly in God’s Word. What is more, those bounds of acceptability are ever-broadened as the media people strive to outdo one another in terms of

audience share: morally we are thus faced with a blatant “race to the bottom”. It is sobering to compare what is served up in films and TV programmes today as compared with even 10 years ago, let alone 50 years ago or more. In terms of visual media output, the rock of Scripture has been replaced by the swirling currents of “what we can get away with”.

Because of the immense power and a-moral agendas of film and TV companies, there is no surprise that the “principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places”, against whom God’s people are set (Ephesians 6.10-12), are so active in this sphere. We are right to remain on guard.

A few practical steps can be taken to ensure that our eyes remain “single” and that the TV programmes and films we choose to watch are a blessing to us and to others in our midst, as they can be, rather than a snare or a curse.

Above all, we can plan beforehand what to watch: in addition to our “thinking on these things” - that lovely list in Philippians 4.8 such as truth, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness, good report and virtue – we can also seek to “watch” on these same things in our decisions over film and television. Is the Lord Jesus content for this or that film or TV programme to come into our lives through our eyes? We can also pre-record programmes if possible, so any wrong images and the adverts can be skipped when they appear.

Perhaps this season of gatherings of families and friends is as good a time as any to limit the hours given over to films, TV and the internet and just “turn the telly off”! Out can come the board games, party games and jigsaws, with even perhaps an old-fashioned sing-song round the piano! - echoes of former, simpler days when “keeping our eyes single” was a great deal easier than today.

In whatever ways we may spend our time in the coming days, may our homes remain as places of Christian love, truth, light and purity, as we rejoice afresh that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth” (from John 1.14, KJV).