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Isaiah 6 contains a couple of the most confusing verses quoted by the New Testament. In verse 9 God instructs Isaiah to tell the people.

“Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.”

And then, in verse 10 He commands Isaiah,

“Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

These verses often prompt questions because they would seem to indicate that God does not want people to repent and be healed from their sin and impurity. How do we make sense of this?

As I try to make sense of these verses I must confess that I am up against the limits of my finite, human understanding. There are elements of human freewill and God’s divine sovereignty that theologians have wrestled with for millennia, and I doubt I will be able to clearly explain them during the course of my lifetime, much less in a single blog. And so, rather than getting into the mire of trying to explain the intricacies of the interaction between sovereignty and freewill, I will simply try to help us grip a concrete application of these verses. For that, I personally find the New Testament to be very helpful.

First, these verses from Isaiah are quoted in Joh. 12:36-43. In the Gospel according to John we encounter a number of *people who chose* not to believe in and follow Jesus, even though they have seen the miracles and signs He has been working. (This is the element of human free will.) These people witnessed miracles that defied explanation... miracles that proved the truth of Jesus’ claims to be the prophesied Messiah. Still yet, their eyes were blind and their hearts were hard, and they chose not to turn from their evil. John says that Isaiah wrote these things because he foresaw the glory of Jesus and was speaking of Jesus. John goes on to say that many, even of the powerful elites, believed the truth of who Jesus was. However, they chose not to confess Jesus (at least at this point in time) because they were afraid they would be put out of the synagogue. They cared more about the glory men give rather than the glory given by God.

This passage in John indicates that, at least in part, the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy has to do with the condition of a person’s heart. The people to whom it applies will not believe and confess the truth, even if they see it with their own eyes. They care more about what others think of them than they do about God’s assessment of them. In other words, they have hearts that are in complete rebellion to God. They do not have a heart-allegiance to God, nor do they acknowledge His authority over them, and so they refuse to acknowledge the truth of who He is and what He is doing. People with this sort of heart are at least some of the ones about whom Isaiah was prophesying.

Second, the verses from Isaiah are also quoted in Mat. 13:10-17. In this short passage, Jesus explains to His disciples why He speaks in parables. He says His parables contain the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, and those to whom it is given will understand those truths. *God both*

*gives and prevents* understanding of these truths, which is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. (This is the element of God's sovereignty.) The parables illustrate truth on a heart level. They aren't systematic discourses and lectures on abstract theology. They are concrete analogies that help people grip spiritual truth in their hearts. And so, only those with a heart-allegiance to God will be given the ability to fully understand the parables.

Following Jesus is not simply about having the ability to outline a set of theological statements. It's about having a heart committed to following Jesus with absolute allegiance in every aspect of your life. This is why Jesus says, in verse 12, "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Someone who simply responds with allegiance to the truth he has been given will be given more understanding. However, when a person responds to the truth by repressing it, his understanding of truth is diminished. Even the small amount of understanding he had, is taken away.

So how can we apply Isaiah 6:9-10 today? Quite simply, we should respond in the manner Larry described in the sermon. We should respond to God's glory with soft, repentant hearts. As we get fresh glimpses of God's glory, reading through Isaiah, we should respond with confession of who God is and who we are. After all, if you choose not to turn Godward now, you never know whether you will ever be given the opportunity to respond in a Godward way again. Apply whatever truth you do understand, today. As Larry repeatedly said during the James series, we need to "take the next Godward step". You may not see all of the path ahead, but simply respond with obedience to whatever God has put in front of you. As you respond with obedience, He will give you more understanding. So... what is the next Godward step you need to take?