

2 Corinthians 4:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Analysis

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen (μὴ σκοπούντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα)—skopeō (σκοπέω, 'to look at, fix one's gaze upon, consider') differs from blepō (βλέπω, 'to see'). We don't focus on what's visible but on what's invisible. This is the life of faith (Heb 11:1, 27)—present realities are judged by future, unseen realities.

For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (τα γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια)—proskairo (πρόσκαιρος, 'temporary, transient, lasting only a while') describes all visible reality: pain, persecution, success, comfort—all temporary. Aiōnios (αἰώνιος, 'eternal, everlasting') describes the invisible: God's glory, resurrection bodies, eternal weight of glory (v. 17). Paul's entire value system is inverted: what seems real (visible) is fleeting; what seems unreal (invisible) is eternal. This is the epistemology of faith.

Historical Context

This verse epitomizes Paul's 'already/not yet' eschatology: we live in the overlap of two ages. The visible, present age is passing away; the invisible, coming age has broken into the present through Christ. Christians live by the reality of the unseen

age while still inhabiting the seen age. This requires radical reorientation of values, perception, and hope—precisely what Paul models.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What 'seen things' are you most tempted to fix your gaze upon—and how do they distract from unseen, eternal realities?
2. How do you practically 'look at things not seen'—what disciplines or practices help you focus on eternal realities?
3. In what ways does American Christianity prioritize temporary, visible things (buildings, numbers, success) over eternal, invisible realities?

Interlinear Text

μὴ	σκοπούντων	ἡμῶν	τὰ	βλεπόμενα	άλλα	τὰ	μὴ
not	While	we	G3588	at the things which are	but	G3588	not
G3361	G4648	G2257		G991	G235		G3361
βλεπόμενα	τὰ	γὰρ	βλεπόμενα	πρόσκαιρα	τὰ		
at the things which are	G3588	for	at the things which are	are temporal	G3588		
G991		G1063	G991	G4340			
δὲ	μὴ	βλεπόμενα	αἰώνια				
but	not	at the things which are	are eternal				
G1161	G3361	G991	G166				

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 5:7 (Parallel theme): (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

Hebrews 11:1 (Parallel theme): Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:13 (Parallel theme): These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

1 John 2:25 (Eternal Life): And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

Matthew 25:46 (Eternal Life): And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 (Eternal Life): Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,