

Luke 24:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

Analysis

But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. This verse reveals the divine reason for the disciples' non-recognition. The passive verb **were holden** (ekratounto, ἐκρατοῦντο) means "were restrained, prevented, held back"—indicating divine action, not merely the disciples' failure to observe carefully. God sovereignly prevented recognition so Jesus could first teach them from Scripture before revealing Himself. The purpose clause **that they should not know him** (tou mē epignōnai auton, τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγινῶναι αὐτόν) shows this was intentional divine withholding.

The verb "know" here is epiginōskō (ἐπιγινώσκω), meaning to fully recognize, acknowledge, understand—not mere intellectual knowledge but experiential recognition. Why would God prevent this? To teach a crucial lesson: **Scripture understanding must precede Christ recognition**. Jesus would first expound Moses and the Prophets (verse 27), warming their hearts through God's Word (verse 32), before opening their eyes to recognize Him (verse 31).

This pattern has profound implications. Genuine knowledge of Christ comes through Scripture, not mystical experience alone. The Word illuminates who Jesus is before we can rightly recognize Him. Modern believers similarly need Scripture-grounded understanding of Christ, not merely emotional encounters detached from biblical revelation. God's temporary withholding served their ultimate good—deeper, Scripture-rooted faith.

Historical Context

The phenomenon of non-recognition despite physical presence occurred in other resurrection appearances. Mary Magdalene mistook Jesus for the gardener (John 20:14-15), disciples fishing didn't initially recognize Him (John 21:4), and here the Emmaus disciples walked with Him for hours unaware. These weren't hallucinations or visions—the risen Christ appeared in a real, physical body that could be touched (Luke 24:39) and ate food (Luke 24:42-43).

Yet His resurrection body possessed unique qualities: ability to appear and disappear (Luke 24:31, 36), pass through locked doors (John 20:19), and apparently be concealed from recognition when He chose. Paul later describes resurrection bodies as "spiritual bodies" (1 Corinthians 15:44)—not less physical but glorified, possessing abilities our current bodies lack.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Why would God intentionally prevent recognition of Jesus until after Scripture teaching?
2. What does this teach about the relationship between biblical understanding and genuine knowledge of Christ?
3. How should this shape our approach to knowing Jesus—through Scripture or through experience alone?

Interlinear Text

οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτόν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι
G3588 **But** **eyes** **him** **were holden** G3588 **not** **know**
G1161 G3788 G846 G2902 G3361 G1921

αὐτόν
him
G846

Additional Cross-References

John 21:4 (Parallel theme): But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

John 20:14 (Parallel theme): And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

Luke 24:31 (Parallel theme): And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

Mark 16:12 (Parallel theme): After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.