

The disciples' myside bias

Written by Bill Perkins

Like a radar system that only detects enemy planes while ignoring friendlies, our minds tend to pick up information that supports what we already believe and ignores the rest. This is called confirmation, or myside bias. It's the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms our preexisting beliefs, while giving less consideration to alternative possibilities.

What Blinded Them?

So what belief biased the disciples so severely they didn't understand Jesus when he repeatedly said he would die and be raised? Why, after one such statement do we read, "They understood nothing of what he told them"? (TJS p. 200).

The answer is found in Daniel 7:13 where we read, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

In the four Gospel accounts the term "the Son of man" occurs 81 times and was the Lord's favorite reference for himself. In fact, nobody else called Jesus the Son of man. I find it interesting that apart from the Greek of the gospels, there is no record of the term "the Son of man" used in any other surviving Greek documents.

He Could Not Die

Even a casual reading of the Daniel 7 passage makes it clear the "son of man" Daniel saw would rule over an "everlasting" dominion and a kingdom that would "never" be destroyed." Since the Lord repeatedly called himself "the Son of man," and since the disciples knew he was identifying himself as the son of man of Daniel 7:13-14, they believed he could not die. That bias prevented them from hearing Jesus when he repeatedly (22 times) directly or indirectly referred to his death.

As Close as My Nose

Once I saw this it triggered a question in my mind. What myside bias do I have that prevents me from understanding a spiritual truth that's as close as my nose? For months I asked God that question. When I finally got an answer, it hurt. I'll share that personal story next week.