

Enlightenment

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Ephesians 5:8

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To become “enlightened” means to have an increase in your secular or spiritual knowledge and/or understanding. Knowledge of the secular comes through the natural means of formal or self education. The various methods and capabilities having to do with that particular kind of knowledge were addressed in some detail in a previous paper having to do with the subject of “epistemology” or how we know what we know. This essay has more to do with spiritual knowledge, or Spirit induced enlightenment in particular; a knowledge which is peculiar to Christians. CS. Lewis stressed this mostly unrecognized truth when he averred, “One of the reasons why it needs no special education to be a Christian is that Christianity is an education itself. That is why an uneducated believer like Bunyan was able to write a book that has astonished the world.” (*Mere Christianity*, bk III, chap.2, para 4, pg. 75) The book to which Lewis referred was of course the popular classic *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

General Illumination

The apostle John informs us that every human being has a God consciousness from the moment of his or her birth. He wrote quite succinctly that “*The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*” (John 1:9-emphasis added) Later in the New Testament the apostle Paul reaffirmed this truth when he wrote “...*what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them.*” (Romans 1:19) Then further on in that chapter Paul again stressed the fact that “...*they knew God...*” but neither glorified nor thanked Him. In fact according to the 18th verse of Romans chapter one they fervently “...*suppressed the truth...*” about this God about whom they had been enlightened at birth. They knew fully well THAT God is, they simply had never learned WHO God is because they had no desire to confront Him due to their sinful nature. The light which an unregenerate person possesses concerning God is but a dim glow (like that seen in a lightning bug’s tail) compared with that which illumines a believers soul when they are born again. It is thus easily snuffed out in the deliberate process of suppressing truth. That is what an avowed atheist attempts to do each and every day that he or she lives. That is what drives them to seek to eliminate every mention of God from the public square.

Spirit's Light

Unlike a pagan, a Christian, being indwelt by the omniscient Holy Spirit, has available to him or her a vast potential for gaining knowledge about God, concerning mankind, pertaining to God's role in history, the future and an abundance of information about the rest of God's plan for creation. Using the Bible in conjunction with the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit a believer can become highly, spiritually enlightened, as Bunyan so aptly proved. That enlightenment begins with the new birth. The apostle Paul described the illuminating event to the church at Corinth as follows, *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* (II Corinthians 4:6) This initial process is what the highly intelligent, 18th Century theologian Jonathan Edwards referred to as "illumination." It is the point at which a sin darkened soul is illumined by the "light of knowledge." The knowledge in question is spiritual knowledge and it is not available to people who are not indwelt by the Third Person of the Trinity. 20th Century, Anglican theologian, J.I. Packer referred to this Spiritual event as "a floodlight ministry enabling sinful men to discern Christ's glory, and to trust and love Him accordingly."

Of his inspired writings and teachings, the apostle Paul once said, *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he **cannot** understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* (I Corinthians 2:13-14, emphasis added)

First, one will note that Paul gave a perfect definition of the Holy Scriptures, "words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." The language of Scripture is as foreign to an unbeliever as Chinese is to a monolingual Englishman. Next the reader will note that Paul indicates that persons without the indwelling Holy Spirit "cannot" understand Scripture or spiritual truth. Their lack of understanding is not a matter of the will but of ability. They can no more understand the Word of God than they can fly like an eagle.

The new birth is absolutely essential to one's ability to attain this kind of spiritual enlightenment. Jesus made that fact perfectly clear to a very intelligent teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures who as yet did not possess the capacity for spiritual knowledge. The man was Nicodemus, a very

intelligent and influential person in the Jewish community and a member of the ruling council. Soon after their conversation began Jesus made Nicodemus' aware of his spiritual bankruptcy and announced, *I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.* (John 3:3) The verb "see" (Greek *eido*) which Jesus used there has to do with comprehension, perceiving with the mind, understanding, rather than a physical, visual perception. When you or I explain something that might be hard to understand, we often ask the one that we've just informed, "Do you see?" Jesus meant that a person who has not been born *of water and the Spirit* (John 3:5), that is born once physically and again spiritually, is incapable of understanding or comprehending the things that pertain to God; all spiritual and supernatural truth.

Nicodemus was equating Jesus with other godly men when he told the Lord that he believed He was a "man sent from God." What the Jewish leader and Pharisee did not comprehend was the fact that Jesus was not merely a man sent from God, he was in fact God sent to men, made in the likeness of men. Most people today_including many religious, Protestant leaders_ believe that Jesus Christ was the greatest man who ever lived. As C.S.Lewis fervently pointed out in his classic publication *Mere Christianity*, "Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." The fact is that Jesus taught, in no uncertain terms, the truth that He was and is God. As Lewis also points out, if He instructed people about that knowing full well that He was not God, He was an abject liar. If on the other hand, He taught that out of some mind altering delusion, even though He was not God, He was a lunatic. Neither a liar nor a lunatic would qualify as a great human teacher or the greatest of all men. Christians know full well who Christ is He's not a liar or a lunatic, He is Lord (The second Person of the Trinity). We know how He came to Earth (I.e. through the incarnation), where He is now (I.e. at the right hand of God the Father) and the fact that He will one day return. That information, or enlightenment came to us from the Word of God as interpreted by the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus asked Peter who various folks thought He was, Peter gave a variety of answers. But then Jesus asked two very personal questions, *But what about you? . . . Who do you say that I am?* (Matthew 17:15) When Peter did utter that great confession of faith as recorded by St. Matthew, Jesus said, *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father who is in heaven.* (Matthew 16:17) We too are blessed by having received the Holy Spirit, sent to us by the Father and the Son. We are blessed because He drew us to Christ (John 6:44) and enabled us to believe in Him (John 6:65). For those of us who have struggled to explain who Christ is,

to spiritually deaf and blind friends, it is reassuring to realize that we are not responsible for whether a person believes or not; that is entirely up to God. The truth of Christ's Person is not "revealed. . .by man." It is the result of the illuminating power of God.

God will take care of those spiritually deaf and blind people in His own good time. We know that by reading what He says, ***I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them. I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These things I will do; I will not forsake them.*** (Isaiah 42:16, emphasis added) One of the "rough places" has to do with the deity of Christ. That spiritual truth has become *A stone that causes men to stumble.* . .(I Peter 2:8) since our Lord began His earthly ministry. It still baffles the unregenerate soul, and only the gift of faith permits any believer to accept the fact the Jesus is fully God and fully man at one and the same time. The "ways" and "unfamiliar paths" are those aspects of the Christian life that none of us knew before we were born again. In fact they were ways that were not only foreign to us but would have appeared displeasing, had we even known of them. But having been indwelt by and enlightened by the Holy Spirit we have the ability to . . .*keep in step with the Spirit* (Galatians 5:25) as we are led along those new paths.

Eternal light

Once God turns on the light in the soul of a believer it will continue to glow for all eternity. At first it is like a dimly lit 15 watt bulb, but through intense Bible study, fervent prayer and obedient application of the things we learn, the wattage increases and the luminescence increases to 60, 75 and 100 watts; that is progressive illumination and it is a sign of our growth in Christ. In heaven our spiritual light will be measured in candle power not watts. But, one thing is clear, the Light of our omniscient God's knowledge is so bright that we will never attain to it. In fact the angels who stand before Him have two wings that are designed for the expressed purpose of protecting their eyes from His blinding light. (Isaiah 6:2)

I once heard a teacher of the Word describe progressive illumination somewhat like this. When first saved the initial spiritual light that we receive is akin to that which dimly illumines a previously dark room such that you can grope around and gradually find your way from one side of the room to the other. The room is much like one that is dimly lit up with a single candle from a birthday cake. In the process of moving about you bump into things, not knowing exactly what they are; they seem to be

strange and unfamiliar objects. With time, and spiritual growth, the room is gradually illuminated a bit more and you begin to say, "Oh that is what I bumped into last week, it's a chair, I'll rest a while." (*Come to me you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28*) Later, with more growth and more light you recognize a water fountain and you take a drink. (*But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water... John 4:14*) Then you find that there's a refrigerator and you get something to eat. (*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Matthew 3:4*) A TV is later discovered and you entertain yourself with a movie (*...hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. II Timothy 6:17*) or you discover a radio and inform yourself with the news (*the man of God...will have no fear of bad news. Psalm 112:7*). Day after day, with prayer, study and obedient application you gain more light and find more things that are useful to your well being, to finding God's will and His plans for you life. CS Lewis said this about the illuminating effects of the Bible and his faith: "I believe in Christianity for the same reason that I believe that the sun came up this morning. Not just because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

The Bible is likened to a mirror by James, the brother of Christ. He wrote, *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and forgets what he looks like.*" The more illumined the place is where we are looking into the mirror the more we see wrong with our faces; beards, zits, blemishes, scars, wrinkles, dirt, etc. As we gain more spiritual insight and illumination we really realize our personal flaws, our sinful nature, and how very much we are in need of God's grace. The more we learn of Him, the less we begin to think of ourselves. The more spiritual light that fills our souls the less worthy of His love we see ourselves to be and the more appreciative we are of God's love and amazing grace toward us.

David said of this, *You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.*(Psalm 18:28) The light progressively and insidiously increases as a believer looks into and studies the Scriptures. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit that person begins to better understand and apply the Word to his or her life. David called the Word of God, . . . *a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* (Psalm 119:105) Each lesson adds to the light of spiritual knowledge and progressively illumines the soul. The apostle Peter also illustrated the illuminating power of God's word when he

wrote, *And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place...*(II Peter 1:19).

Reflecting The light

Jesus said that He was the Light of the world. (John 8:12) But He also said that Christians are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14) While that may appear to some as a contradiction (Bible critics say as much), it is not. The sun lights the world by day and the moon by night. The moon is intrinsically dark, that is it contains no light source of its own. It is only able to give light to the night on Earth by way of reflecting the light from the sun. So it is with all believers. Each human has been born in a state of intrinsic, spiritual darkness. Darkness is literally the absence of light. However, at the moment of one's new birth, as explained above, the darkness is partially expelled and through spiritual growth becomes even less apparent as the light increases in spiritual wattage. Thus, every Christian has the capacity to reflect the light of Christ onto those who live in spiritual darkness and the more one grows spiritually the more light one has to reflect. The apostle Paul made this truth quite plain when he wrote, *And we. . .all reflect the Lord's glory. . .being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* (II Corinthians 3:18)

When Jesus told His followers that they were "light" He also used an example of a lamp that lights a darkened room. He instructed them not to put the lamp under a bushel basket but to place it on a lampstand so that it would illumine the entire room. He was using that metaphor to teach them not to hide their faith but to profess it within the sight of everyone. In those days, the lamps were filled with oil that burned when the wick was lit; no oil, no light. Throughout Scripture oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. As we become more consumed by and filled with the Holy Spirit our Spiritual candlepower increases and we reflect more of the Lord's glory. St Francis of Assisi said, "It is the responsibility of every Christian to witness all day and every day, and if necessary to speak." St Francis was talking about being a quiet reflection of Christ.

Finally, the verse with which we began this study, appearing just below the title, was purposely left incomplete. The final words in that verse containing Paul's admonition were, *Live as children of light.*

He then went on to give this very sound advice, *For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth. And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in darkness. But everything exposed to the light becomes visible for it is the light that makes everything visible.* (Ephesians 5: 8-14)

Like CS Lewis with his sun light analogy, every one of us can have a spiritual perspective that illumines the world around us and enables us to see and understand things that others don't. By reflecting the love and grace of Christ we can be the witnesses that St. Francis encouraged us to be. By knowing God, His Word, the promises He has made regarding the future and our role in His perfect plans we can be at peace and live without fear. Then we can fulfill the promise that God gave us regarding communion with Him when He inspired the apostle John to write, *if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from all sin.* (I John 1:7)

Soli Deo Gloria