

**Conversion to Jesus Christ:
(11) God's Calling of a Sinner unto Salvation (part 2)**

On recent Sundays we had considered the biblical teaching regarding God's nature of God's preparation of the sinner prior to his conversion to Jesus Christ. Last Lord's Day we began to describe the actual conversion event when God does a transforming work in the life of a sinner causing him to be transformed into a true Christian, one who loves God, has trusted his soul to God through Jesus Christ, who has come to believe and submit to Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. This is repeatedly referred to in Scripture as God *calling* the sinner unto salvation. This presumes the inability of man to convert himself, even as it underscores the biblical truth that salvation is wholly a work of God's grace apart from any input or effort of the sinner. With respect to salvation, the Bible teaches *monergism*,¹ which is God working alone to save His people--not *synergism*--which claims that God works in conjunction with man's free will and effort resulting in man's salvation. Salvation is wholly of God's grace and not of ourselves.

Regarding God's calling, we showed that this initial work of saving grace in a sinner is set forth by the apostle in **Romans 8:28-30**

And we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He *predestinated*, these He also *called*; whom He called, He also *justified*; and whom He justified, these He also *glorified*.

Here are the steps of grace in which God brings His own to salvation by grace. He chooses them to become saved (election and predestination). At a point in time He effectually *calls* them to Himself to receive salvation. He *justifies* the ones that come to Him; that is, He forgives them of their sins and credits the righteousness of Christ to them. He *glorifies* each of them that He has justified. We gave this definition of what the Bible teaches respecting God's effectual call:

*Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered us in the gospel."*²

Let us begin today by considering another passage that speaks to the subject we have been addressing--God's effectual call of sinners to salvation. Let us turn to **2 Timothy 1:8-11**.

¹ The historic reformed position is that of monergism. God of His own free will saves His people. He comes to them and illuminates their hearts and minds to the truths of the gospel, then He regenerates them, thereby enabling their willing belief and compliance to the gospel. **Martin Luther** said this about "free will", so-called: "I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, My Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in truth faith." Luther debated the Roman Catholic theologian, Erasmus, on the issue of the human will. One of Luther's classic books, *The Bondage of the Will*, is a record of Luther's arguments in this debate. The church historian, **Michael Haykin** stated, "The Reformation was not merely about justification through faith alone but, **more importantly**, it considered '...whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith.'" This is one of the points of belief that cause us to regard ourselves as a Reformed church. The word that is commonly used to describe God's work alone is **monergism**, from *erg* meaning work, and *mono*, meaning "alone." We believe the Bible teaches monergism: God alone takes the initiative and saves His people by His grace.

² This is the answer to question #31 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Here we read of Paul writing to Timothy with respect to the gospel. He encouraged the young minister to be bold in the gospel, for both he and Timothy had been the recipients of God's saving grace that had been wrought in them by the gospel. Paul described God who had saved them, having *called* them by His irresistible grace.

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹*Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began*, ¹⁰but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

First, let us consider what the Lord had done for them: “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2:9). God had “saved” them, meaning that God had delivered them from sin and God's wrath upon sin. God had brought them out of a condition of misery and condemnation into a state of God's forgiveness and favor. Moreover, God had “called them”, that is, from having been at great distance from God, God and called them unto Himself.

Now, although the order of words suggests that God had saved them and then called them, we know that this was not Paul's meaning. God had saved them by having called them. It was an effectual call. God had purposed to save them and He did so. It was all of grace.

Paul described God's calling to salvation as a “holy calling.” The calling is holy because it comes forth from a holy God. But it is also holy because the call results in fallen men becoming regarded by God as holy even as He begins a work in them to make them holy. God's effectual call, His holy call, initiated this work of God in the sinner so as to become and be like a saint--a holy one.

Secondly, we read the **cause for which the Lord did this for them**. Paul expressed first what was not the cause, speaking *negatively*. It was not due to any merit on their part, “*not according to our works*.” There was nothing about Paul or Timothy that moved God to call them to salvation. It was not because God foresaw something that they would do, might do, could do—it was not according to works.

But then Paul describes *positively* the cause of God calling them to salvation, “*but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began*.” God had called them according to His own *purpose*. This alludes to God's election of Paul and Timothy in eternity and his predestination of them unto their salvation. Before time began God decreed all things that would come to pass in history. History is an unfolding, a playing out, of His eternal decrees. Before time began, God purposed to save Paul and Timothy. Before time began, God purposed to save you, if He has called you unto Himself.

And then we read that God had saved Paul and Timothy, calling them to salvation according to God's **grace**. It was due to God's free and sovereign love bestowed upon them freely in Christ Jesus that was the reason that God had effectually called them to salvation.

And so, effectual calling is the work of God whereby He brings His elect into a saving relationship with Himself. It is the fulfilling of His purpose to call His beloved ones unto Himself. Through God's effectual call, God begins to apply the work of salvation that He ordained in eternity that His elect would receive freely. Again, this is in accordance with what Paul wrote in Romans 8. There we read,

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover **whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified**; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rom. 8:28-30)

Why is it necessary that God effectually call His elect unto salvation? The puritan, **Thomas Boston** (1652-1736), answered this quite well. Christians were in need of God's effectual call unto salvation because:

1. They were far off from God, God needs to call them unto Himself. Ephesians 2:13, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.”

2. They are hard and fast asleep, and they need this call: Ephesians 5:14, “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

3. But if they are awakened, they would not know where to go. They are as those who were awakened on the day of Pentecost. But what was their reaction to the apostles? Acts 2:37, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’”

4. But if they did know where to go, they are not willing to go there. In John 5:40 Jesus said, “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

5. If they were willing to go to Christ, yet being awakened, they dare not venture, because guilt so stares them in the face. While the man is asleep, it is nothing to him to believe, to come to Christ; like people that walk in their sleep, they can go anywhere fearlessly. But when he is awakened, it is not so easy. He will then be like Adam, hiding himself on hearing the voice of the Lord, and will not come until he is called by the Lord Himself.

6. And lastly, if they durst (dare) to come, yet they cannot come, unless they are drawn. John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”³

Now last Lord’s Day, as we began to explain the nature of God’s effectual call, we spoke of *illumination*, which is the work of God’s grace in which He reveals saving truth to the one He is bring to salvation. When God extends His inward, effectual call to salvation, He calls His people to understand and to value spiritual reality, spiritual truth. But in our discussion of this matter we were careful to point out that God commonly illuminates lost people that He has not intended to bring to salvation. The fact is that God is able, and does frequently illuminate people to spiritual truth, but *that illumination does not result in their salvation*. God can reveal to people, giving them understanding of His ways, as well as insight into their own spiritual needy condition, and yet they are never converted to Christ. This is in accordance with what we considered regarding God’s general call of mankind in comparison and contrast to God’s effectual call. The general call of God through the gospel may be accompanied with much understanding, even understanding given by the Holy Spirit (illumination), but does not result in salvation.

But thankfully *there is God’s illumination of the sinner that does result in salvation*. This form of illumination accompanies God’s effectual call of His people unto their salvation. When God brings salvation to an individual, *God Himself teaches that person that He is a sinner and that Christ is the Savior*. This is not to take away from the human instrument of the preacher or Christian witness. But when the individual whom God intends to save hears the Word of God taught or preached, and if it is in God’s timing, God Himself opens the eyes of that person to understand the reality and importance of the truth.

We sought last week to describe in some detail the nature of God’s grace in illumination. *First, the grace of God in illumination that results in salvation is a sovereign act of God’s power* (cf. 2 Cor. 4:1-6). *Secondly, spiritual illumination is more than knowledge of biblical words and theological ideas; the grace of illumination that results in salvation results in the sinner seeing and embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior*. And then *thirdly, we saw that spiritual illumination is both through the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit*. It is at this point we concluded last Lord’s Day. Let us continue from where we left off:

4. Spiritual illumination may be understood as occurring in two forms. There is an illumination of spiritual truth that does *not* result in salvation and there is an illumination of truth to the soul that *always* results in

³ *Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (Richard Owen Roberts Pub., 1980), vol. 1, pp. 562-64.

salvation. [Some have referred to this distinction external illumination and internal illumination. Perhaps it would be preferable to think in terms of general and special illumination, just as there is general and effectual (special) calling.]

a. Let us first consider external illumination that does not itself result in salvation. This form of illumination occurs when God gives understanding of His Word, but this understanding does not convert the sinner. The Bible does not use the term “external” with respect to illumination, but *the Scriptures clearly speak of a calling that involves illumination that is not efficacious*; it does not save the soul. But in this calling the sinner is brought to understand a degree of spiritual truth. For example, the Lord Jesus gave the parable of the marriage feast in **Matthew 22:2-14**. He spoke of many being invited to the marriage feast, but not all came.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ ⁵But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. ⁷But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ ¹⁰So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹² So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴***“For many are called, but few are chosen.”***

Our Lord taught the same lesson in **Luke 14:16-24** in His parable of the great supper.

Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, ¹⁷and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ ¹⁸But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ ¹⁹And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ ²⁰Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ ²²And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ ²³Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴***For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.***”

These parables reveal the fact that God graciously invites many to salvation who never do come unto Him in faith and repentance. In this gracious act of God, He reveals or illuminates people of the great blessing they could receive freely from God through faith in Jesus Christ. And so, God may externally illuminate people to their need of salvation, of the facts of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, an understanding of God’s promise of forgiveness and the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. But these people remain in the guilt of their sins. Their condemnation will be aggravated in the Day of Judgment due to their greater knowledge than many who die in ignorance. Our Lord once used an analogy of a master punishing his servants:

“But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:48)

And so, *something more is yet needed for salvation than external illumination*. For a person can go so far as even being instructed by the Holy Spirit Himself, and yet be short of true salvation. Paul wrote,

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. (1 Cor. 13:2)

Peter wrote of false teachers in the church who had been ordained to condemnation, who had, nevertheless, encountered a measure of moral reformation in their lives through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, yet they were still unsaved. We read in **2 Peter 2:20f**,

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

So you see that God must do more than merely help people to understand the *truth intellectually and emotionally*. There is the need for illumination of the sinner that surpasses that extended to these one. This has sometimes been referred to as **internal or special illumination**.

b. Internal illumination occurs when God gives understanding of His Word so as to transform a person. This is a work of the Holy Spirit in which He reveals not only the *reality*, but the *significance* of biblical truth to individuals. Either while reading the Bible or hearing the Bible taught, God enables people to understand spiritual truth through His work of illumination, but this hearing is with power. The sinner is struck with the reality of it—it is true! The sinner is struck with the importance of it—it is vital! The sinner is struck with the responsibility to respond to it—it must be obeyed. God causes his elect one to see the reality and the relevance of what God says respecting his sin, his need for salvation, his need for repentance, and his remedy that is in Jesus Christ alone. The illuminated sinner possesses a desire to conform his faith and life to the gospel that he has come to understand and value.

This illumination may be quite remarkable and have quite a significant impact on a person. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of a person to see the truth of what God says about sin, about God's righteousness and the certainty of God's judgment. The person is made vividly aware of the person of Christ and the way of salvation through Him. This person, because the truth is so vivid, embraces it, or so it would seem. He may do many things to show that He "believes" what he has been made to understand. This internal illumination is evident when the knowledge of the gospel produces a true turning from sin unto Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. This person is convicted of personal sin. This person comes to understand that Christ is more than just "a" savior. He confesses, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior."

We see clearly that the Lord Jesus illuminates people to spiritual truth in the account of our Lord on the day of His resurrection, when He met and spoke with His disciples. In **Luke 24:27** we read that our Lord conducted a Bible study with two of His disciples who were traveling to the village of Emmaus "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." We might say that this would be an example of the *external* illumination that the Lord gives His people.⁴ But we read later that our Lord met with the disciples in Jerusalem. We read that then our Lord gave them a more full understanding of the truth of these matters. **Luke 24:44f** read, "He said to them, 'These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' *And He opened their understanding, that they might*

⁴ Of course we may assume that the Lord was also working inwardly in these two disciples at this time to give true understanding of the Scriptures.

comprehend the Scriptures. They had inward comprehension in which the relevance and importance of the truth of the Scriptures.⁵

John Flavel wrote of the need and importance of this internal illumination of God to the sinner:

And indeed, there is but little excellency in all those petty notions which furnish the lips with discourse, unless by a sweet and powerful influence they draw the conscience and will to the obedience of Christ. Light in the mind is necessarily antecedent to the sweet and heavenly motions and elevations of the affections: For the farther any man stands from the light of truth, the farther he must needs be from the heat of comfort. Heavenly quickening are begotten in the heart, while the sun of righteousness spreads the beams of truth into the understanding, and the soul sits under those its wings; yet all the light of the gospel spreading and diffusing itself into the mind, can never savingly open and change the heart, without another act of Christ upon it; and what that is, the text informs you; “Then opened he their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures.”⁶

Both external and internal illumination are necessary. One might describe this need as the importance of informing the mind, but also the necessity of informing the heart. Again, **John Flavel** wrote of the Lord Jesus illuminating the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Christ’s act upon their understandings: He opened their understandings. By understanding is not here meant the mind only, in opposition to the heart, will, and affections, but these were opened by and with the mind. The mind is to the heart, as the door to the house: what comes in to the heart, comes in at the understanding, which is introductive to it; and although truths sometimes go no farther than the entry, never penetrate the hearts, yet, here, this effect is undoubtedly included.

Expositors make this expression parallel to that in Acts 16:14. “The Lord opened the heart of Lydia.” And it is well observed, that it is one thing to open the scriptures, that is, to expound them, and give the meaning of them, as Paul is said to do in Acts 18:3, and another thing to open the mind or heart, as it is here. There are, as a learned man truly observes, two doors of the soul barred against Christ; the understanding by ignorance; and the heart by hardness: both these are opened by Christ. The former is opened by the preaching of the gospel, the other by the internal operation of the Spirit. The former belongs to the first part of Christ’s prophetic office, opened in the foregoing sermon: the latter, to that special internal part of his prophetic office, to be opened in this.

And that it was not a naked act upon their minds only, but that their hearts and minds did work in fellowship, being both touched by this act of Christ, is evident enough by the effects mentioned, verse 52, 53. “They returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.” It is confessed, that before this time Christ had opened their hearts by conversion; and this opening is not to be understood simply, but *secundum quid*, in reference to those particular truths, in which, till now, they were not sufficiently informed, and so their hearts could not be duly affected with them. They were very dark in their apprehensions of the death and resurrection of Christ; and consequently their hearts were sad and dejected about that which had befallen him, ver. 17. But when he opened the scriptures and their understandings and hearts together, then things appeared with another face, and they returned, blessing and praising God.⁷

Jonathan Edwards wrote a sermon in which he set forth the biblical teaching regarding God’s illumination of the sinner that results in salvation. It was entitled, “**A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine.**”

⁵ It is clear, of course, that in the first instance the Lord also gave these two disciples an inward understanding that impacted their lives. Later they remarked to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). We see this explained in Flavel’s remarks above.

⁶ John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life Opened*. The quotations we have provided are from chapter 10, in which he set forth the prophetic office of Jesus Christ.

⁷ Ibid.

I would show what this spiritual and divine light is. And in order to it, would show, *first*, in a few things what it is not. And here, *Not Mere Conviction of Sin and Misery*

1. Those convictions that natural men may have of their sin and misery, is not this spiritual and divine light. Men in a natural condition may have convictions of the guilt that lies upon them, and of the anger of God, and their danger of divine vengeance. Such convictions are from light or sensibleness of truth. That some sinners have a greater conviction of their guilt and misery than others, is because some have more light, or more of an apprehension of truth than others. And this light and conviction may be from the Spirit of God; the Spirit convinces men of sin: but yet nature is much more concerned in it than in the communication of that spiritual and divine light that is spoken of in the doctrine; it is from the Spirit of God only as assisting natural principles, and not as infusing any new principles. Common grace differs from special, in that it influences only by assisting of nature; and not by imparting grace, or bestowing any thing above nature. The light that is obtained is wholly natural, or of no superior kind to what mere nature attains to, though more of that kind be obtained than would be obtained if men were left wholly to themselves: or, in other words, common grace only assists the faculties of the soul to do that more fully which they do by nature, as natural conscience or reason will, by mere nature, make a man sensible of guilt, and will accuse and condemn him when he has done amiss. Conscience is a principle natural to men; and the work that it doth naturally, or of itself, is to give an apprehension of right and wrong, and to suggest to the mind the relation that there is between right and wrong, and a retribution. The Spirit of God, in those convictions which unregenerate men sometimes have, assists conscience to do this work in a further degree than it would do if they were left to themselves: he helps it against those things that tend to stupify it, and obstruct its exercise. But in the renewing and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, those things are wrought in the soul that are above nature, and of which there is nothing of the like kind in the soul by nature; and they are caused to exist in the soul habitually, and according to such a stated constitution or law that lays such a foundation for exercises in a continued course, as is called a principle of nature. Not only are remaining principles assisted to do their work more freely and fully, but those principles are restored that were utterly destroyed by the fall; and the mind thence forward habitually exerts those acts that the dominion of sin had made it as wholly destitute of, as a dead body is of vital acts.

The Spirit of God acts in a very different manner in the one case, from what he doth in the other. He may indeed act upon the mind of a natural man, but he acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling vital principle. He acts upon the mind of an unregenerate person as an extrinsic, occasional agent; for in acting upon them, he doth not unite himself to them; for notwithstanding all his influences that they may be the subjects of, they are still sensual, having not the Spirit, Jude 19. But he unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new supernatural principle of life and action. There is this difference, that the Spirit of God, in acting in the soul of a godly man, exerts and communicates himself there in his own proper nature. Holiness is the proper nature of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit operates in the minds of the godly, by uniting himself to them, and living in them, and exerting his own nature in the exercise of their faculties. The Spirit of God may act upon a creature, and yet not in acting communicate himself. The Spirit of God may act upon inanimate creatures; as, *the Spirit moved upon the face of the waters*, in the beginning of the creation; so the Spirit of God may act upon the minds of men many ways, and communicate himself no more than when he acts upon an inanimate creature. For instance, he may excite thoughts in them, may assist their natural reason and understanding, or may assist other natural principles, and this without any union with the soul, but may act, as it were, as upon an external object. But as he acts in his holy influences and spiritual operations, he acts in a way of peculiar communication of himself; so that the subject is thence denominated spiritual.

Arthur Pink wrote of the transforming nature of spiritual illumination, which he refers to as spiritual enlightenment:

By this “anointing” or enlightenment the quickened soul is enabled to perceive the true nature of sin—opposition against God, expressed in self-pleasing. By it he discerns the plague of his own heart, and finds that he is a moral leper, totally depraved, corrupt at the very center of his being. By it he detects the

deceptions of Satan, which formerly made him believe that bitter was sweet, and sweet bitter. By it he apprehends the claims of God: that He is absolutely worthy of and infinitely entitled to be loved with all his heart, soul, and strength. By it he learns God's way of salvation: that the path of practical holiness is the only one which leads to Heaven. By it he beholds the perfect suitability and sufficiency of Christ: that He is the only One who could meet all God's claims upon him. By it he feels his own impotence unto all that is good, and presents himself as an empty vessel to be filled out of Christ's fullness.

A Divine light now shines into the quickened soul. Before, he was "darkness," but now is he "light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). He now perceives that those things in which he once found pleasure, are loathsome and damnable. His former concepts of the world and its enjoyments, he now sees to be erroneous and ensnaring, and apprehends that no real happiness or contentment is to be found in any of them. That holiness of heart and strictness of life which before he criticized as needless preciseness or puritanical extreme, is now looked upon not only as absolutely necessary, but as most beautiful and blessed. Those moral and religious performances he once prided himself in and which he supposed merited the approval of God, he now regards as filthy rags. Those whom he once envied, he now pities. The company he once delighted in now sickens and saddens him. His whole outlook is completely changed.

Divine illumination, then, is the Holy Spirit imparting to the quickened soul accurate and spiritual views of Divine things. To hear and *understand* is peculiar to the "good-ground" hearer (Matthew 13:23). None but the *real* "disciple" *knows* the Truth (John 8:31, 32). Even the Gospel is "hid" from the lost (2 Cor. 4:4). But when a quickened soul is enlightened by the Spirit, he has a feeling realization of the excellence of the Divine character, the spirituality of God's Law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin in general and of his own vileness in particular. It is a Divine work which capacitates the soul to have real communion with God, to receive or take in spiritual objects, enjoy them, and live upon them. It is in this way that Christ is "formed *in us*" (Gal. 4:19). Thus, at times, the Christian is able to say: "*Thy shining grace can cheer, this dungeon where I dwell. 'Tis paradise when Thou art here, If Thou depart, 'tis Hell.*"⁸

5. Spiritual Illumination is an act of God's grace through the instrument of His Word being taught and preached.

Revelation speaks of God revealing Himself by imparting His Word. Illumination speaks of God revealing Himself by giving understanding of the Word He has already given. You are not going to learn about God as to what you are to believe or as to how you are to live, but through His giving you understanding of the Word that He has already given to us in the Scriptures. As the prophet said, we say,

To the law and to the testimony (i.e. the Scriptures); if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isa. 8:20)

Sometimes the grace of illumination may come *gradually*; at other times God grants a *sudden*, unveiling of truth to the soul. When we were pastoring in Munich, Germany, I had the privilege of observing God's work of grace in people from different cultures and backgrounds. Some would seem to come suddenly and remarkably to the truth about Jesus Christ, but others did not. I observed Germans, for example, as being rather slow and methodical in the manner that they came to truth. A German non-Christian would visit church hear a sermon, go away and think upon it. He would ask questions. He would perhaps go to others who taught differently and compare and consider carefully what he himself believed. But after careful and sometimes prolonged consideration, he would step forward and commit himself to Jesus Christ, embracing the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the gospel. And his commitment was a solid one and he stayed faithful to the things of Jesus Christ.

But there would be others, and Americans would be among them, who seemed to become quite enthused with a single exposure to scriptural truth. It is as though they were ignorant before coming to church, and when

⁸ From Arthur Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, in the chapter entitled, "The Spirit Enlightening."
http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Holy_Spirit/spirit_12.htm

they home they did so having a whole new world opened to them. God works in all kinds of people in different ways to different degrees.

The gradual or sudden coming to spiritual truth through God's grace of illumination is reflected in Paul's praying for the Christians in the church at Ephesus. He wrote to them these words:

¹⁵Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷***that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,*** ¹⁸***the eyes of your understanding being enlightened;*** that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power (Eph. 1:15-19)

Paul wrote, "*I do not cease...making mention of you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.*" The phrase "knowledge of Him" may be somewhat misleading. We tend to be rather Greek in our thinking rather than Hebrew. The Greeks focused on obtaining an **intellectual knowledge about** things. When we look at this phrase we might think it is referring to knowledge **about** God. The Hebrews' concern was for **relational knowledge**. The emphasis is on knowing God rather than knowing about God. Paul was praying that God would give them a realization of their relationship to God. He prayed that "***that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.***" He saw that their greatest need was that they understand more fully their relationship with God. This remains our greatest need. "*This is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*" (John 17:3).

Now notice, we see from **verse 17** that if a Christian is to know God, God must reveal Himself. God cannot be found or discovered; God must reveal Himself in order to be known. This is why Paul was praying to God--that God might give them an understanding of Himself. This is the grace of **illumination**.

We see here that God illuminates people in two ways so that they may know Him more fully. Paul prays that God would do so in both ways for these new Christians.

a. Paul prayed that God would give them a spirit of wisdom. This would be that understanding of one's relationship with God that gradually deepens as he/she learns the Word of God. This is an accumulated knowledge of our relationship attained through the prayerful study and hearing of God's word. Never study the Bible without having offered prayer first. Never attempt to listen to God's Word taught or preached without first having prayed that God would give you a spirit of wisdom so that you may understand the truth of His Word when it is taught. We are to pray as the psalmist, "*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*" (Psa. 119:18).

b. Paul prayed that God would give them a spirit of revelation. How does this differ from a "spirit of wisdom?" Whereas a spirit of wisdom is a gradual accumulation of knowledge through hearing, thinking, and reflection, ***a spirit of revelation is a sudden, perhaps astounding apprehension and comprehension of God and one's relationship to Him.*** It is a sudden enlargement of understanding that impacts the mind and heart. It is spiritually to your understanding like it is visually when you come forth from the trees and see a vast panorama before you that would almost overwhelm you.

The Greek word translated "**revelation**" is *apokalypseos* (*ἀποκαλύψεως*), the same word used for the last book of the Bible, the Revelation. This is not a reference to dreams and visions; rather, it is the sudden awareness of God that can only be experienced through to prayer. The idea is reflected in **Job 42:5**, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You." Job had obtained a fresh understanding of his relationship with God only due to God having revealed Himself to Job. In the same way, Paul wanted God to show these new believers all that they were and deserved due to their sin, but what they had indeed received fully and freely by His grace through Jesus Christ. If these new believers were enabled to see these truths, they would be forever be firmly planted in the faith and set on a course that would lead them unto their eternal

blessed destiny. This was so important to Paul that he restated his prayerful activity for these believers later in chapter three. We read in **3:14ff**,

For this reason *I bow my knees* to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, *that He would grant you*, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, *being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend* with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – *to know the love of Christ* which passes knowledge; *that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*.

And so, Paul, once having heard of the new faith of the Ephesians began to pray that God would give them a more full comprehension of who they were in sin when God came to them in grace and saved them through His grace. Paul desired that that their “eyes might be enlightened” by God to behold these great and mighty things. If this were to occur, they would never be the same. As one once described this:

If the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God be conferred, then the scales would fall from the moral vision, and the cloudy haze that hovers around it melts away. It is as if a man were taken during the night to a lofty mountain shrouded in vapor and darkness, but morning breaks, the sun rises, the mist departs, rolls into curling wreaths and disappears, and the bright landscape unfolds itself to his delighted vision (John Eadie, 19th c.).

Since all that we have said today speaks of the need of God’s work of grace in giving us understanding and applying the truth to minds and hearts, do you see the futility of resorting to other means other than the plain and clear proclamation of the Word to secure some kind of response or commitment to Christ? The Bible is the only sufficient means by which God accomplishes His work in His people. All other gimmicks, programs, methods, are ineffectual substitutes that only delude people into thinking that they are spiritual and have some kind of relationship with Jesus Christ. But even in all of our reading and teaching and proclaiming, we need the blessed grace of our Triune God to intervene and do a great work of converting the soul, or that soul will remain dead to the things of Jesus Christ. How dependent we are on the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of the Word of God to our hearers! May God give us confidence and boldness and conviction to resort to His instrument of His Holy Word even as we rely on His grace to accomplish His purposes in our lives.

But also, we might ask ourselves if we have ever been the objects of God’s illuminating grace, this internal illumination as it has been described. Do you see the truth of these matters respecting salvation? That is good, but it is not good enough. More than that, do you see the importance, the exquisite value of them? Do you perceive the glory and wonder of them? Do you see the privilege that God has bestowed upon you that you do? If you know nothing of these feelings of love, appreciation, and highest regard for the truth that is in Jesus Christ, you are probably still in your sins. Pray that our Lord will not allow you to continue in your cold indifference. Pray that He would cause this truth to grip your soul and conform your will to His will. And may He be merciful and gracious to do so.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10)
