

# THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 15

## GOD'S SUBJECTIVE REVELATION IS ESSENTIAL

by A.W. Pink

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### Transcript

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Chapter 15

GOD'S SUBJECTIVE REVELATION

IS ESSENTIAL

Our urgent need for something more than an external revelation from God, even though it be a written communication from Him, inspired and inerrant, was intimated in our last chapter in a general way. Now to be more specific. Our need of an immediate and inward discovery of God in the soul, or for a supernatural work of grace to be wrought in the heart in order to fit us for a saving knowledge of Him and the receiving of His Truth, arises from the power which sin has upon man. Sin has such a hold upon the affections of the unregenerate that no human arguments or persuasions can divorce their heart from it. Sin is born and bred in man (Ps. 51:5), so that it is as natural for fallen man to sin as it is for him to breathe. Its power over him is constantly increased by long-continued custom, so that he can no more do that which is good than the Ethiopian can change his skin (Jer. 13:23). It is his delight: "It is sport to a fool to do mischief (Prov. 10:23). Sinners have no other pleasure in this world than to gratify their lusts, and therefore they have no desire to mortify them. It has such a maddening effect upon them that, "their hearts are fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Nothing but the might of God can change the bent of man's nature and the inclination of his will. The impossibility of a sinner's coming to Christ without an effectual call from God, or His quickening application of the Word to his heart, appear again from the strong opposition of fallen man. "Three things must be wrought upon a man before he can come to Christ. His blind understanding must be enlightened, his hard and rocky heart must be broken and melted, his stiff, fixed, and obstinate will must be conquered and subdued—but all these are effects of supernatural power. The illumination of the mind is the peculiar work of God (2 Cor. 4:6). The breaking and melting of the heart is the Lord's own work: it is He that gives repentance (Acts 5:31). It is the Lord that takes away the heart of stone, and gives an heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26); it is He that pours out the spirit of contrition upon man (Zech. 12:10). The change of the natural bent and inclination of the will is the Lord's sole prerogative (Phil. 2:13)" (John Flavel). None but the Almighty can free sin's slaves or deliver Satan's captives. It is a work of infinite power to impart

grace to graceless souls, to make those who are carnal and worldly to become spiritual and heavenly. The call of God is to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7), and nothing but omnipotence can make the unholy respond thereto. The same must be said of the nature of that faith by which the soul comes to Christ. Everything in faith is supernatural. Its implantation is so (John 1:12, 13). "It is a flower that grows not in the field of nature. As the tree cannot grow without a root, neither can a man believe (savingly) without the new nature, whereof the principle of believing is a part" (Thomas Boston). No vital act of faith can be exercised by any man until a vital principle has been communicated to him. The objects of faith are supernatural—Divine, heavenly, spiritual, eternal, invisible—and such cannot be apprehended by fallen man: his line is far too short to reach to them. The tasks allotted faith lie not within the compass of mere nature—to deny self, to prefer Christ before the dearest relations of flesh and blood, to adopt His Cross as the principle of our lives, to cut off the right hand and pluck out right-eye sins—are contrary to all the dictates of natural sense and reason. The victories of faith bespeak it to be supernatural: it overcomes the strongest oppositions from without (Heb. 11:33, 34), purges the most deep-seated corruptions within (Acts 15:9), and resists the most charming allurements of a bewitching world (1 John 5:4). Nothing short of that mighty power which raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to the right hand of God can enable a depraved creature to savingly believe (Eph. 1:19, 20). Divine teaching is absolutely essential for the reception and learning of Divine things, and without it all the teaching of men—even of God's most faithful and eminent servants—is inefficacious. God Himself cannot be apprehended merely by the intellectual faculty, for He is spirit (John 4:24), and therefore can only be known spiritually. But fallen man is carnal and not spiritual, and unless he be supernaturally brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light, he cannot see Him. This Divine teaching is promised: "Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will He teach sinners in the way" (Ps. 25:8). Sinners are subjects on whom He works, elect sinners, on whom He works savingly: "all Thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Isa. 54:13). In them God makes good His assurance, "I will give them a heart to know me" (Jer. 24:7), and until He does so there is no saving acquaintance with Him. No book learning can acquire it: "According as His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). That Divine power communicates life to the soul, light to the understanding, sensitivity to the conscience, strength to the affections, a death-wound to our loving knowledge of Him" (2 Pet. 1:3) consists of such a personal discovery of God to the heart as conveys a true, spiritual, affecting perception and recognition of His surpassing excellence. God is revealed to it as holy and gracious, clothed with majesty and authority, yet full of mercy and tender pity. Such a view of Him is obtained as causes its favored subject, in filial and adoring language, to exclaim, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Job 42:5). God Himself has become an awe-inspiring but blessed reality to the renewed soul. He is beheld by the eye of faith, and faith conveys both a demonstration and an inward subsistence of the objects beheld. The Father is now revealed to the heart (Matthew 11:27). The word "reveal" means to remove a veil or covering, and so exhibit to view what before was hidden. The blessed Spirit, at regeneration, removes that film of enmity which sin has produced, that blinding veil which is upon the depraved mind (2 Cor. 3:14), that "covering" which is "cast over all people" (Isa. 25:7). The saving revelation which is made to an elect sinner is not a creating of something which previously had no existence, nor is it ab extra to the Word: nothing is ever revealed to the soul by the Holy Spirit which is not in the Scriptures. It is most important that we should be quite clear on this point, or we shall be in danger of mysticism on the one hand or fanaticism on the other. "To expect that the Spirit will teach you without the Word is rank enthusiasm, as great as to hope to see without eyes: and to expect the Word will teach you without the Spirit is as great an absurdity as to pretend to see without light—and if any man says the Spirit teaches him to believe or do what is contrary to the written

Word, he is a mad blasphemer. God has joined the Word and the Spirit, and what God has joined together let no man put asunder" (W. Romaine). "The Spirit of God teaches and enlightens by His Word as the instrument. There is no revelation from Him but what is (as to our perception of it) derived from the Scriptures. There may be supernatural illuminations and strong impressions upon the mind in which the Word of God has no place or concern, but this alone is sufficient to discountenance them, and to prove they are not from the Holy Spirit" (John Newton). There is real need to labour this point, for not a few highly strung people and those with vivid imaginations have been deceived thereon, supposing that strange dreams, extraordinary visions, abnormal sights and sounds, are the means or manner in which the Holy Spirit is made manifest to the soul. Those who look for any such experience are far more liable to be deluded by Satan than enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit supplies no new and different revelation today from that which He has already made in the written Word. God indeed spoke to His servants of old by dreams and extraordinary means and made known to them hidden mysteries and things to come—but a "vision and prophecy" is forever "sealed up" (Dan. 9:24). Through Paul it was announced that prophecies should "fail" (be given no more) and tongues should "cease" (1 Cor. 13:8), and they did so when the Canon of Scripture was completed. All of the Divine will, so far as it can be of any use to us in the present life, is already clearly made known to us in the Old and New Testaments. The testimony of the Spirit in the Scriptures is a "more sure Word" than any voice from Heaven (2 Pet. 1:19)! The most fearful curse is pronounced upon those who presume to add to or diminish from the testimony of God in the Scriptures (Rev. 22:18, 19). It is plain to the Christian that Mohammed, John Smith and Mrs. Eddy who pretended to be the recipients of special revelations from God, were lying impostors. Others who claim to have received any Divine communications of their own souls, over and above what is contained in or may be rightly deduced from God's infallible Word, are themselves deceived, and on highly dangerous ground. "God does not give the Spirit to His people to abolish His Word, but rather to render the Word effectual and profitable to them" (Calvin on Luke 24:45). The Holy Scriptures "are able to make wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15), yet not apart from the Spirit; the Spirit illuminates, yet never apart from the Word. The Spirit has first to open our sin-blinded understandings, before the light of the Word (2 Pet. 1:19) can enter our souls. He alone can seal the Truth upon the heart. The things revealed in the Bible are real and true, but the natural man cannot perceive their spiritual nature, nor is he vitally affected by them, for he has no inward experience of the realities of which they treat. By means of religious education and personal application to the study of the same, the natural man can obtain a good understanding of the letter of Scripture, and discourse fluently and orthodoxly thereon; yet the light in which he discerns them is but a merely natural or mental light; and while that be the case his experience is the same as that of those described in 2 Timothy 3:7—ever learning and never able to come to the [spiritual, Divine experiential] knowledge of the truth." The religion of the vast majority in Christendom today is one of tradition, form, or sentiment—destitute of one particle of vital and transforming power. Unless the Spirit of God has regenerated and indwells the soul, not only the most pleasing ritual but the most orthodox creed is worthless! Reader, you may be an ardent "Calvinist," subscribe heartily to the soundest "Articles of Faith," assent sincerely to every sentence in the Westminster Confession and Catechism, and yet be dead in trespasses and sins. Yea, such is your sad condition at this very moment, unless you have really been "born of the Spirit" and God has revealed His Son in you (Gal. 1:16). "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from Heaven" (John 3:27). How little is that statement understood by the majority of professing Christians! How unpalatable it is to the self-sufficient Laodiceans of this age, ignorant as they are of their wretchedness, poverty and blindness (Rev. 3:17). Though the wisdom and power of the Creator manifestly appear in every part of His creation, yet when the first Gospel preacher was sent to the Gentiles he had to declare, "the world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21). Though the Jews had the

Holy Scriptures in their hands and were thoroughly familiar with the letter of them, yet they knew neither the Father nor His Son when He appeared in their midst. Nor are things any better today. One may accept the Bible as God's Word and assent to all that it teaches, and still be in his sins. He may believe that sin is a transgressing of God's Law, that the Lord Jesus is alone the Saviour of sinners, and even be intellectually convinced that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and yet be entirely ignorant of God to any good purpose. Until a miracle of grace is wrought within them, the state and experience of all men—spiritually speaking—is, "Hearing, ye shall hear, and not understand; seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive" (Acts 28:26). They cannot do so until the veil of pride and prejudice, carnality and self-interest be removed from their hearts, by God's grace. The soul must be Divinely renovated before it is capable of apprehending spiritual things. The careful reader will have noticed that the marginal rendering of John 3:27, is: "A man can take unto himself nothing, except it be given him from Heaven." He must first be given a disposition in order to do so. What a word was that of Moses to the Israelites: "Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt . . . Yet the LORD hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day" (Deut. 29:2-4)—they took not to them the implications of what God had done so as to profit therefrom. Many have "the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law" (Rom. 2:20) in their heads, but are total strangers to the power of it in their hearts. Why is this the case? Because the Spirit has not made an effectual application of it to them: they have received no inward revelation of it in their souls. Let us furnish a specific illustration: "For I was alive [in my own esteem] without the Law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:9). From earliest childhood Saul of Tarsus had been thoroughly acquainted with the words of the Tenth Commandment, but until the hour of his spiritual quickening they had never searched within and "pricked him in the heart" (Acts 2:37). Hitherto, that "Hebrew of the Hebrews" was proud of his orthodoxy, for had he not been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the perfect manner of the Law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God (Acts 22:3)? Conscientious in the performing of duty, living an irreproachable life, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:6) in his outward walk, he was thoroughly pleased with himself. But when the Spirit of God applied to his conscience those words, "thou shalt not covet," his complacency was rudely shattered. When God gave him grace to perceive and feel the spirituality and strictness of the Divine Law, that it prohibited inward lustings, all unholy and irregular desires, he was convicted of his lost condition. He now saw and felt a sea of corruption within. He realized he stood condemned before the bar of a holy God, under the awful curse of His righteous Law, and he died to all self-esteem and self-righteousness. When the Law was Divinely brought home to his conscience in shattering power, it was like a bolt from the blue, smiting him with compunction: he became a dead man in his own convictions, a justly sentenced criminal. Have you, my reader, experienced God's Word to be "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit"? Have you found it to be "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4: 12)—of your heart? You have not merely by the reading of it, nor by the hearing of it. That Word must be applied by an Almighty hand before it cuts a soul to the quick: only then is it "the sword of the Spirit"—when He directs it. It is only by the blessing and concurrence of the Spirit that the Word is made to produce its quickening, searching, illuminating, convicting, transforming and comforting effects upon the soul of any man. Only by the Spirit is the supremacy of the Word established in the soul. It is by His teaching that there is conveyed a real apprehension of the Truth, so that the heart is truly awed and solemnized, by being made to feel the authority and majesty of the Word. Only then does any man realize the vast importance and infinite value of its contents. By the inward work and witness of the Spirit the regenerate have a personal and infallible source of evidence for the Divine inspiration and integrity of the Scriptures to which the unregenerate have no access. Spiritual life is

followed by Divine light shining into the heart, so that its favored subject perceives things to be with him exactly as they are represented in the Word. The Spirit makes use of His own Word as a vehicle for communicating instruction. The Word is the instrument, but He is the Agent. The holiness of God, the spirituality of His Law, the sinfulness of sin, his own imminent peril, are now discovered to the soul with a plainness and certainty which as far exceed that mental knowledge which he previously had of them as an ocular demonstration exceeds a mere report of things. By the Spirit's teaching he obtains radically different thoughts of God, of self, of the world, of eternity, than he ever had before. Things are no longer general and impersonal to him: "thou art the man" has become the conviction of his conscience. He no longer challenges that awful indictment, "the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7), for he is painfully aware of the awful fact that he has been a lifelong rebel against Heaven. He no longer denies his total depravity, for the Spirit has given him to see there is "no soundness" in him—that there is nothing in him by nature but deadness, darkness, corruption, unbelief and self-will. Those who are inwardly taught of God discover there is abundantly more of evil in their defiled natures and sinful actions than ever they realized before. There is as great and real a difference between that general notion which the natural man has of sin and that experiential and intuitional knowledge of it which is possessed by the Divinely quickened soul as there is between the mere picture of a lion and being confronted by a living lion as it meets us roaring in the way. In the light of the Spirit, sin is seen and felt to be something radically different from how the natural man conceives it. None knows what is in the heart of fallen man but God. He has delineated the same in His Word, and when the Spirit opens the eyes of the sinner's understanding, he sees himself in its mirror to be exactly as God has there portrayed him—with a heart which is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). His secret imaginations are now discovered to him; his pride, his presumption, his awful hypocrisy are beheld in all their hideousness. The sight and sense which the illumination of the Spirit gives him of his wickedness and wretchedness is overwhelming: he realizes he is a leprous wretch before a holy God—he sees himself as irreparably ruined—lost.

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