

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 16 GOD'S SUBJECTIVE REVELATION THE HOLY SPIRIT MUST QUICKEN

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Transcript

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Chapter 16

GOD'S SUBJECTIVE REVELATION

THE HOLY SPIRIT MUST QUICKEN

We have dwelt upon the revelation which God has made of Himself in the material universe, in the moral nature of man, in the shaping of human history, in His incarnate Son, and in the Holy Scriptures. We have pointed out that while the evidence which the first three supply for the existence of God is ample to expose the irrationality of skepticism, and to show that the Infidel is without excuse, and that while the testimony of the last two transmit to us a clear and full communication of the Divine will and make plain our path of duty, yet none of them nor all combined are sufficient of themselves to bring any man—fallen and sinful as he now is—to a saving knowledge of and relation to the thrice Holy One. While the natural man may be intellectually assured of God's existence, that Christ is His Son, that the Bible is His inspired Word, and that while he may acquire an accurate theoretical understanding of the Scriptures, he cannot either discern, receive, or relish them spiritually and experimentally—and in order thereto, he must first be made spiritual, "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6), become "a new creature in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). The absolute necessity for a supernatural work of grace upon the human heart to fit it for the taking in of a spiritual knowledge of spiritual things was shown from its indisposedness unto them because of its native depravity, from the might and enthralling power which sin has over it, as well as from the transcendency of Divine things over the scope of human reason, and of the nature of that faith by which alone they can be apprehended. In a word, that an answerableness or correspondency between the object apprehended and the subject apprehending is indispensable. But what accord or concord is there between an infinitely holy God and a totally depraved and defiled sinner? And thus the work of the Spirit within the sinner is as imperative as is the work of Christ for him. The Word itself does not produce its quickening, searching, convicting and converting effects except by the blessing and concurrence of Him who of old moved holy men to write it. In short, before anyone can obtain a saving and sanctifying knowledge of God, he must make a personal, supernatural, inward discovery of Himself to the soul. As none but God can change night

into day, so He alone can bring a sinner out of darkness into His own marvelous light. "All thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Isa. 54:13). There is a teaching of God without which all the teaching of man—even that of His most gifted and faithful servants—is ineffectual and inefficacious. The One by whom the elect are taught is the Holy Spirit, and therefore is He rightly called, "The Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph. 1:17). Not because He reveals to the soul anything which is not found in the Word itself. But first, because it was by His own wisdom and revelation that the penmen of Scripture were enabled to write what they did; and second because it is by His operations that what they wrote is now made effectual unto their souls. He begins by regenerating them—imparting to them a principle of spiritual life, without which they are incapacitated to see the things of God—(John 3:3). Then He makes to their renewed mind a real and spiritual application of the same, so that they are realized in the heart, and are found to be Divine realities. By the work of the Spirit, the soul obtains an actual experience of the things contained in the Scriptures, thereby receiving fulfillment of that promise, "I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). All of God's children are taught by Him, yet not in the same degree, nor in the same order of instruction. God exercises His sovereignty here, as everywhere, being tied by no rules or regulations. That there is variety in the influences of the Spirit is intimated in that figurative expression, "Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (Ezek. 37:9), and is more definitely stated in, "There are diversities of operation, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Cor. 12:6). Though God ever acts as He pleases, and always with unerring wisdom, and where His people are concerned, in infinite grace; usually His operations upon their souls follow more or less a general pattern. But in every instance such a revelation of God is made to the soul, as none can understand or appreciate except those who have been made the favored subjects of the same. It is accompanied by a life and light, power and pungency, such as no preacher can possibly impart. An effectual application of the Truth is then made so that its recipient is enabled to know and feel his own personal case before God—to see himself in His light, to have an actual experience of things which hitherto were only hearsay to him. Here we should, perhaps, anticipate an objection. Some may be inclined to think that in the two chapters preceding this one and in what follows here, we have wandered somewhat from our present subject. That we are supposed to be treating of that immediate and inward, that personal and saving revelation which God makes of Himself to the soul: whereas we appear to be bringing in that which is extraneous and irrelevant, by describing the varied experiences through which a soul passes just prior to and in his conversion. But in reality, the objection is pointless. As "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," so an inward knowledge of God Himself is the beginning of spiritual life and the first entrance into vital godliness. "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). There cannot be any evangelical conviction and contrition, still less a coming to Christ and resting upon Him, until God Himself is known. We never move toward God in Christ until He directly shines in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6), and thus the efficacious cause of faith is neither the clearness of our minds nor the pliability of our wills, but our effectual call by God from death unto life. As no artist would undertake to draw a picture which would exactly resemble every face in each feature and particular, yet may produce an outline which will readily distinguish a man from any other creature, so we shall not essay to give such a delineation of regeneration and conversion as will precisely answer to every Christian's experience in its circumstances, but rather one which should be sufficient to distinguish between a supernatural work of grace and that which pertains to empty professors. All births are not accompanied by equal travail, either in duration or intensity, yet it is often the case that those who have the easiest entrance into this world are the greatest sufferers in infancy and childhood. So some of God's children experience their acutest pangs of conviction before conversion and others afterward, but sooner or later each is made to feel and mourn the plague of his own heart. "The first actings of faith are,

in most Christians, accompanied with much darkness and confusion of understanding; but yet we must say in the general that wherever faith is, there is so much light as to discover to the soul its own sins, dangers, and wants, and the all-sufficiency, suitableness, and necessity of Christ for the supply and remedy of all; and without this, Christ cannot be received" (John Flavell). The selfsame light which discovers the holiness of God to a soul necessarily reveals its own vileness. Though the Spirit does not enlighten in the same measure or bring different ones to perceive things in the same order, yet sure it is that He teaches everyone certain fundamental lessons, and that, in a manner and to an extent which they never understood before. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," and before one will savingly betake himself to the Great Physician he is made conscious of his need of His ministrations. When a soul is quickened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, his heart is opened to a sight and sense of sin. A work of Divine grace is made perceptible first on the conscience, so that its subject is given to realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin. He now perceives how offensive it is unto God and how destructive unto his own soul. The malignity of sin in its very nature is seen as a thing contrary to the Divine Law. He who had previously felt himself secure, now realizes he is in terrible danger. If he is one who was already a professing Christian, he now knows that he was mistaken, deluded—that what he thought to be peace, was nothing but the torpor of an unawakened conscience. Conviction of sin is followed by a wounding of the heart, for life is accompanied not only with light but feeling also, otherwise its subject would be a moral paralytic. The sinner is filled with shame, compunction, horror and fear. He apprehends his own wickedness and pollution to be such as none other was ever guilty of. He sees himself to be utterly undone, and cries "Woe is me." He no longer laughs at what is recorded in Genesis 3, or any longer has any doubt about Adam's fall, for he perceives his sinful image in himself—conveyed to him at his very conception, a defiled nature from birth. He has been given an experiential insight into the mystery of iniquity. He now realizes that so far from having lived to the glory of God, self-gratification has been his sole occupation. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done evil in Thy sight" (Ps. 51:4) is now his anguished lament. He thinks there was never a case so desperate as his, and fears there is no hope of forgiveness. Now his heart "knoweth its own bitterness." This anguish of heart is something radically different from that sorrow for sin which is sometimes found in graceless souls, which usually consists of being ashamed because of their fellows or a chagrin at their own folly. Even Judas repented of betraying his Master, but not with a "godly sorrow" (2 Cor. 7:10). It is not the degree but the nature of our sorrow for sin which evidences whether or not it be produced by the grace of God. That grief for sin which issues from a gracious principle is concerned for having flouted God's authority, abused His mercies, and been indifferent whether his conduct pleased or displeased Him. Whereas the sorrow of the natural man proceeds only from self-love: his grief is that he wrecked his own interests and brought misery upon himself. The quickened soul is now thoroughly ashamed and abased. He no longer makes excuses, but takes sides with God and unsparingly condemns himself. The guilt of sin lies heavily upon him, as an intolerable burden. The sentence of the Law is pronounced in his conscience. He perceives that there is no soundness in him, that his case is desperate to the last degree. How can I escape my merited doom? is now his great concern. Those who have not sat under a preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God wherein Christ is freely offered to all who hear it, and have reached the stage described above, are now at their wit's end. The condition and case of such a one is no worse than it was formerly, but the scales have been removed from his eyes and he sees himself in God's light. The soul is now brought to a state of utter unrest and disquietude: not only unable to find any satisfaction in the creature, but even to obtain the slightest relief from the things of time and sense. He seeks help and peace here and there, only to find they are "cisterns which hold no water." He is at a total loss about deliverance, and sees no way of escape from that eternal doom to which he now realizes he is fast hastening. He once thought that a little

repentance would save him, or a cry to God for mercy would suffice for pardon, but he now finds "the bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself on, and the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in" (Isa. 28:20). Neither meet his dire need. What shall become of me? is now the question which wholly absorbs his thoughts. If, like a drowning man seeking some object that he may grasp to support him, he turns unto professing Christians and inquires in what way the Lord dealt with their souls and how they obtained relief—sometimes he will receive a little encouragement, but more often that which dampens his faint hope that God will yet be gracious unto him that he perish not. As he listens to what one and another relates, he realizes that it is not the path which he is treading, that he has not experienced the things which they did, and he is brought to the place of self-despair. He wishes that he had never been born, for he fears that in spite of all his convictions and anguish he may be lost forever. He feels his utter helplessness and has an experiential realization that he is "without strength" (Rom. 5:6). Yet so far from this sense of his impotency producing apathy and inertia, he is increasingly diligent in making use of the means of grace: he now searches the Scriptures as he never did before, and cries from the depths of his soul, "Lord save me" (Matthew 14:30). "Understandest thou what thou readest?" said Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. "How can I?" he replied, "except some man should guide me" (Acts 8:27-33). Nevertheless, he read the Scriptures, and God graciously and savingly met with him therein, using Philip as His instrument to preach Jesus unto him. None but Christ can save a sinner: He alone can remove the burden of guilt, cleanse the conscience, speak peace to the heart. As sin is loathed and hated, and self-righteousness is renounced, room is made in the soul for Christ. There is no true desire for Him until the utter vanity of this world has been felt—that its most alluring pursuits and pleasures are nothing better than the husks which the swine feed on. Sin must be made bitter as wormwood to us, before Christ can be sweet to the heart. God must wound the conscience by the lashing of His Law, ere the healing balm of Christ's blood is longed for. Like the prodigal in the far country, the soul must be brought to the place where it cries, "I perish with hunger," before the rich provisions of the Father's house are really sought. It is in this way the blessed Spirit prepares the heart for the receiving of Christ. By giving him to understand his condition and case: his sins, his guilt, his pollution, his emptiness, his personal demerit, his misery. By giving him such a sense of the same as causes him to die unto himself, to renounce himself, to abhor himself to acknowledge that the worst that God says of him in His Word is true. Thereby the Holy Spirit shows him that he is exactly suited to Christ, who is "mighty to save," and who does save "to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25). He makes him to realize that he is a fit subject for the Great Physician to exercise his loving kindness upon, to heal him of his loathsome leprosy, to pardon his innumerable sins, to supply all his need out of the exceeding riches of His glorious grace. The Holy Spirit is pleased to show the self-condemned soul that Christ has nothing in His heart against him, that He is full of compassion, of infinite power, in every way meet for him; that He came into the world with the express purpose to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Thus is Christ made desirable unto him. But it is one thing to perceive our need for and the perfect suitability of Christ and to have longings after Him, and quite another for Him to be made accessible and present to us. There has to be an inward discovery of Him to the soul before He is made a reality unto it and laid hold of by him. Said the Saviour, "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone that seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life" (John 6:40). Note well the order of those two verbs: there must be a "seeing" of the Son with the eye of the soul before there can be any saving believing on Him. In other words, the same One who has removed the scales of pride and prejudice from the sinner's eyes to behold his own abject state, must show him the glorious Object on which his trust is to be reposed. The light of the Gospel now shines into his heart, and he is enabled to behold "the King in His beauty." When He is beheld thus it must be said, "flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee," but it has been supernaturally communicated by

the Spirit. Christ is now made known as "Fairer than the children of men," as wholly suited to and all-sufficient for the stricken sinner. The soul is now assured that, "the Son of God is come, and has given him an understanding that he may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20). The heart is taken with Him, attracted by Him, drawn to Him, and cries, "Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." A convincing and fully-persuading realization of the truth of the Gospel concerning Christ is his. The Spirit has vouchsafed no new and different revelation of Christ than what was in the written Word, but He has given a supernatural efficacy unto the Gospel to his soul, as truly as the blowing of the rams' horns was made by God to cause the walls of Jericho to fall down. The hour has come when the hitherto dead soul hears the voice of the Son of God, and hearing, lives (John 5:25). His voice has come to him with quickening energy. The saving knowledge of Christ which is thus obtained is a vastly different thing from having a good opinion or orthodox conception of Him: He is now realized to be everything which the justice of an angry God required for satisfaction and everything which is required by the most indigent soul. Christ now dwells in his heart by faith, and the testimony of such a one is, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25), and neither man nor Satan can make him deny it. Before the Holy Spirit, in His sovereign and invincible power, dealt with my soul, I was "blind": blind to the just claims of Christ's holy sceptre, blind so that I saw in Him no beauty that I should desire Him, blind to my own folly in spending money for that which was not bread and by seeking contentment and satisfaction away from Him. But now I see": see His surpassing loveliness and superlative worth, see that He loved even me and gave Himself for me. I see that His precious blood cleanses me from all sin. I see that He is the only One worth living on and living for. Hear him singing from the heart, "Thou O Christ are all I want, more than all, in Thee I find." Hear him as he avers with the Apostle, "I count all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). Behold him, as lost in wonder, love, and praise, he bows in adoration and exclaims, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." How different is such a coming to Christ, closing with Him, and knowledge of Him, from that of the deluded and empty professors! Rightly did the Puritan Flavell declare, "Coming to Christ notes a supernatural and almighty power, acting the soul quite above its own natural abilities in this motion. It is as possible for the ponderous mountains to start from their bases and centers, mount aloft into the air, and there fly like a wandering atom hither and thither, as for any man of himself, i.e., by a pure natural power of his own, to come to Christ. It was not a stranger thing for Peter to come to Christ walking upon the waves of the sea, than for his or any man's soul to come to Christ in the way of faith." It is only as the Spirit quickens the dead soul, makes him sensible of his desperate condition and deep need, reveals Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, and by a powerful inclining of his will, that he is brought to cast himself on Him, and that he obtains for himself a saving experience of the Gospel, in contradistinction from a mere hearsay knowledge of it. This personal and secret revelation of God in the soul is a miracle, as truly and as much so as when darkness enveloped the chaos of Genesis 1:3, and God by a mere fiat said, "Let there be light, and there was light." This is clear from, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts unto the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face [or "Person"] of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). In His own ordained hour, by a sovereign and almighty act on His part, a supernatural, saving and sanctifying knowledge of God is communicated to the souls of each of His elect. This knowledge of God is spiritual and altogether from above, being wholly Divine and heavenly. Being miraculous, this unique experience is profoundly mysterious. Its favored subject contributes nothing whatever to it, not so much as desiring or soliciting the same. "There is none that seeketh after God. . . the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:11, 17, 18). It could not be otherwise, for by nature all are, spiritually speaking, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). There can be no spiritual sight of spiritual objects, no spiritual hearing, still less any spiritual actions, until spiritual life is imparted to the soul. No one can

possibly have any spiritual hatred of sin, any pantings after holiness, any saving faith in Christ, until he has actually "passed from death unto life." In every instance where God graciously gives this inward and vivifying revelation of Himself. He declares, "I am found of them that sought Me not" (Isa. 65:1)—the subsequent seeking of the soul is the reflex, the consequence, the effect, of His initial seeking it. As we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), so we call upon Him (Rom. 10:13), because His effectual call (1 Pet. 2:9), preceded and capacitated ours. The "Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2) must first join Himself to the spiritually-dead soul in quickening power, before he has any spiritual life or light. In that initial operation of the Spirit, the soul is wholly passive and unconscious. Regeneration is not something which we actually "receive," but is wrought in its subject once and for all. Was not natural life communicated to me without any act of mine? What act did I perform when a living soul was imparted to me? Nothing: it was utterly impossible that I should. Being and life were Divinely given to me without any volition whatever on my part. The soul must be Divinely renovated before it is able to discern or relish spiritual things. The natural man, totally depraved as he is, can neither perceive the reality of spiritual things, be impressed with their excellence, or have his affections drawn after them. How can the natural man savingly believe in Christ when he has no grace, no power of will upwards, no sufficiency in himself? Coming to Christ is a spiritual motion, for it is the soul going out to Him. But motion presupposes life, and as there can be no natural motion or movement without natural life, so it is spiritually. Deny that, and you deny the indispensability of the Spirit's work of grace to bestow life, light and sight. Something in addition to life and light is required: the Spirit must remove from our eyes the scales of pride and enmity before we can perceive our ruined condition. Coming to Christ imports both a sense of need and a hope of relief: it is an actual closing with Him as He is freely offered to sinners in the Gospel, by a practical assent of the understanding and hearty consent of the will. By the Spirit alone are we awakened from the sleep of carnal sloth and unconcern for our eternal welfare. By Him alone are we given to perceive the spirituality and strictness of the Divine Law, and feel its condemning power in our conscience. The Spirit alone shows us ourselves and brings us to realize that our very nature is a sewer of filth. He reveals to us our desperate need of Christ, who overcomes our hostility to Him, and makes us willing to receive Him as our Prophet to teach and instruct us, our Priest to atone and make intercession for us, our King to rule over and fight for us. It is wholly by His powerful operation that Christ is formed in us "the hope of glory." By Him alone do we obtain an experimental and intuitional knowledge of Christ. Said the Saviour, "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I that He shall take of mine and shall show it unto you" (John 16:14, 15). "Show it," not in the mere letter of it (there is no need for Him to do that, for by a little diligence we can grasp the literal or grammatical meaning for ourselves), but in the spirituality, blessedness and power thereof. The preciousness and potency of the things of Christ are set home on the renewed mind by the grace and energy of the Spirit in such a manner that the believer is inwardly assimilated thereto. He shows them not to his reasoning faculty but to his heart, and in such a way as to impress a real image thereof, fixing the same indelibly in his affections. The Spirit is He who gives unto him soul-satisfying, heart-warming apprehensions of the Saviour's love, so that at times he is quite lifted out of himself, his thoughts being raised above the things of time and sense, to be entirely absorbed with the "altogether lovely" One, and thus vouchsafes him an earnest and foretaste of his eternal joy. It is the Spirit's special office to magnify Christ: to make Him real unto His redeemed, to endear Him to their souls, until He becomes their "All in all." Every true thought entertained of Christ, every exercise of the believer's affections upon Him, is through the effectual influence of the Spirit. All true fellowship and communion which the Christian has with the Redeemer, all practical conformity unto His holy image, is by the Spirit's gracious operations. We are completely dependent upon Him for every spiritual breath we draw and spiritual motion we make. But

we have been somewhat carried away—it is not easy for love to heed the requirements of logic! The last three paragraphs should have been preceded by the statement that, though an inward revelation of God to the soul be both truly miraculous and profoundly mysterious, yet it may be identified and known to its participant. To the participant we say, for it is no less impossible to explain the same by mere words to one who has had no actual experience of the same, than it would be to convey any intelligible concept of color to one born blind or of sound to one born totally deaf. It may be known by its attendants and by its fruits. When life and being were given me naturally, all that followed was but the effects and consequences of the same. In due time I was brought forth into the world—a feeble and needy, but living and active creature, yet entirely dependent upon others. So at regeneration the soul has spiritual life imparted to it, is born again, and all that follows in the experiences of that soul is but the effects and fruits thereof, making manifest the reality of it, so that by comparison of its present history with its past, and by an examination of both in the light of Holy Writ, the great change may be clearly and indubitably informed. God has endowed the soul with the power of reflection, so that it may be conscious of its own condition and operations. Therefore does He bid professing Christians, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:5). The Psalmist tells us, "I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search" (77:6). God has so wondrously constituted man that he is able to look within and form a judgment of himself and of his actions, and at regeneration he is given "the spirit of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7) so that he may form an impartial and true judgment of himself. While some are too introspective, others are not sufficiently so for their own good. The regenerate soul has power not only to put forth a direct act of faith upon Christ, but also to discern that act: "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). In this way Christians may attain unto a certainty of their saving knowledge of and union with Christ. The more so since they have received the gift of the blessed Spirit, by which "they might know the things that are freely given to them of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13), which is apparent from His operations within us. It most highly concerns each reader to examine and try his knowledge of God, and make sure it be something more than a merely natural and notional one, namely that he has been favored with a spiritual and experiential discovery of God to his soul. "Being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them . . . have given themselves over unto lasciviousness. But ye have not so learned Christ: if so be ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man" (Eph. 4:18-22). There a contrast is drawn between the unregenerate Gentiles and the Ephesian saints. The latter had learned both from the precepts and example of Christ. The question for them to make sure about was, Had they really been taught inwardly and effectually by Him, so that a vital change was evident in their character and conduct? That "if so be" intimated that nothing was to be taken for granted. They must put themselves to the proof and ascertain whether the truth dwelt in and regulated them as it did the Saviour: whether in short, the teaching they had received was inoperative or whether it had produced a radical change in their daily lives. By its fruit is the tree known. The inward and immediate revelation of God to a soul is made manifest by its accompaniments. It is accompanied by a principle of life, of grace, of holiness. It is attended with light and warmth and power, producing a great and glorious change within, renovating each faculty of the soul. Therein it differs radically from the "conversions" of modern evangelism which effects no such change. It is attended with the opening of the eyes of the understanding, enabling its subject to see God, Christ, self, sin, the world, eternity—in a light he did not previously. Such sights, under the gracious influences of the Spirit, lead to the experiences of conviction, contrition, and conversion, described in the preceding chapters. The quickened soul not only now discovers the true nature of sin, but feels the guilt and burden of it, and unfeignedly sorrows for and

hates it. He is brought to realize the worthlessness of all self-help and creature performances. He is enabled to take in, little by little, a knowledge of Christ from the Word, by which means he is led to an acquaintance with Him and his will is brought to a full surrender to Him. Thus there is an efficacy accompanying the Spirit's teaching which is not found in any man's teaching: illuminating the understanding, searching the conscience, engaging the affections, drawing the heart unto it, sanctifying the will. As there is both an outward and an inward "hearing" of the things of God (Acts 26:26), an ineffectual "learning of the Truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), and an effectual one (Eph. 4:20-22), so there is a knowledge of God which is inefficacious (Rom. 1:21), and a knowledge of Him which is saving (John 17:3). How am I to ascertain that mine is the latter? Answer: from its effects. It is not the quantity but the quality, not the degree or extent of the knowledge but the kind of it that matters and that is evidenced by its products. A real Christian may have a far inferior intellectual grasp of the Truth than has an unregenerate theologian, and yet possess a spiritual and sanctifying knowledge thereof to which the theologian, after all his studying, is a stranger. Concerning all the renewed God says, "But the Anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same Anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in it" (1 John 2:27). That "Anointing" is the Person and operations of the Holy Spirit, and where He indwells a soul no man is needed to teach him there is a God, that the Bible is His Word, that Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour, etc. Let us now describe some of the effects of this Divine anointing. First, it is a realizing knowledge. Its grand Object is no longer known theoretically and inferentially, but actually and immediately, not by a process of reasoning but intuitively. God, who is spirit and invisible, is made visible and palpable to the soul. Does that strike some of our readers as being too strong a statement? It would not, had they experienced the same, and it should not, if they be at all familiar with Holy Writ, for of Moses it is said, "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). God was real to his faith, though imperceptible to his senses. At the new birth such a discovery of God is made to the heart that its subject avers with Job, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (42:5). The recipient of that manifestation is awed by a sense of His majesty, His authority, His power, His holiness, His glory. Such a revelation of the Most High is overwhelming: he dare not trifle any longer with Him, for he now knows something of the being and character of the One with whom he has to do. In like manner, the Gospel becomes to him something very different from merely an external proclamation by God's servants—it now is "the ministration of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8) inwardly. In the light of God the soul sees things as they actually are. Hitherto, if he had not a false concept of them, it was but a notional acquaintance at best. But now he views himself the present life, the hereafter, as God does, perceiving that all under the sun is but vanity and vexation of spirit. When truth is applied by the Holy Spirit its authority and spirituality are discerned, its power and pungency are felt, its savor and sweetness are tasted, its excellence and uniqueness are realized. When God is inwardly revealed to a person he becomes better acquainted with Him in five minutes this way, than in a lifetime of reading books and hearing sermons about Him. It is not an acquired knowledge, but an infused one, obtained by no mental efforts, but is Divinely imparted. As a very different image is begotten in the mind by actually seeing a person face to face than by looking upon his portrait, so by the secret operations of the Spirit a spiritual subsistence of God is wrought in the soul. Let the ablest artist paint a picture of the sun, let him use the brightest pigments and most brilliant colors, yet what a wan and insipid representation does he make in comparison to the shining and splendor of the sun itself! Glorious apprehensions of God and His Christ are conveyed and begotten in the renewed soul by the Spirit. He has now "seen" the Son (John 6:40) for himself, has "heard" His voice (John 5:25), "handled" Him by faith (1 John 1:1), "tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:3). Second, it is a convincing and certifying knowledge. By this inward and gracious

teaching of God there is given to the heart such personal evidence of the wonders of wisdom and the riches of His grace as set forth in the Gospel, that he is fully persuaded of the same. A firm and unshakeable assurance of the verity of what is revealed in the written Word is conveyed to the soul, for the Spirit works an inward experience of the same in him, so that their reality and actuality is known and acknowledged. There is an ocular demonstration made to him by the light of the Word and the power of the Spirit revealing and applying them to the one born again, so that the teachings of the Scripture and the experiences of the believer, by these means, answer to one another as do the figures in the wax and the engravings in the seal. As a Spirit-taught person reads the Bible, especially much in the Psalms or a chapter like Romans 7, he finds the workings of his heart are accurately portrayed there, and says, "That is exactly my case." Such an experience supplies far stronger proof than can either reason or sense, and though faith be occupied with things not seen by the eyes of the body and which are far above the reach of reason, yet it produces a conviction and certainty which is more conclusive and invincible than any logical demonstration. The internal witness of the Spirit is much more potent and satisfying than all arguments grounded upon human reasoning. The natural man may be intellectually convinced that the Bible is the Word of God, and yet never have had an experiential sense of the spirituality of His Law and a heart-conviction that he is a guilty transgressor of it. He may entertain no doubt whatever that the Lord Jesus is the only refuge from the wrath to come, and still be a complete stranger in his soul to His so-great salvation. A spiritual assurance that the Scriptures are Divine can no more be obtained without the inward witness of the Spirit than can a spiritual understanding of their contents. It is an essential part of His distinctive work to produce a spiritual and supernatural faith in the hearts of God's elect, so that they receive the Word on the alone testimony of its Author. When that faith has been communicated, he can no more doubt the integrity of the Scriptures for he now "knows the certainty of those things wherein he has been instructed" (Luke 1:4). Such an assurance will cause him to cling to the Truth and confess it though there were not another person on earth who did so. He now values the Bible as his dearest earthly possession, and no matter how he might be tempted to do so, will steadfastly refuse to "sell" or part with the Truth. Third, it is an affecting knowledge. The notions possessed by the natural man, Scriptural though they be, exert no spiritual influence upon him and produce no godliness of character or conduct. They are inoperative, ineffectual, inefficacious. He may perceive clearly that sin is hateful to God and harmful to himself, that if cherished and continued in, it will certainly damn him, yet his lusts dominate him. He may be well informed upon the excellence of holiness, and the necessity of possessing it if ever he is to enter Heaven, yet self-love and self-interests turn the scales and prevent his seeking it wholeheartedly. A natural knowledge of spiritual things penetrates no deeper than the brain, neither influencing the heart nor moving the will. The empty professor may subscribe sincerely to the doctrine of man's total depravity, but it never moves him to cry from the depths of an anguished soul, "O wretched man that I am." The doctrinal light which the unregenerate have is like that of the moon's: it quickens not, possesses no warmth, produces no fruit. A merely theoretical knowledge of the Scriptures, however accurate or extensive it may be, leaves the heart dead, cold, barren. Radically different is that spiritual knowledge which God imparts to the renewed mind. It has a vitalizing, convincing, moving and powerful effect upon the whole of the inner man. It conveys a real subsistence of Divine things to the soul, so that the understanding discerns and knows them, the affections delight in and cleave to them, the will is influenced and moved by them. "Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit" (Isa. 48:17). He teaches so much of the evil of sin as makes it the most bitter and burdensome thing in the world to us. He teaches us so much of our need for and the worth of Christ as moves us to freely take His yoke upon us—which none do unless they have been Divinely tamed. Spiritual light is like that of the sun's, which not only illuminates, but warms and fructifies, and therefore is Christ designated, "The

Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2). All the real teaching of the Spirit has a powerful tendency to draw away from self unto Christ, to a fixation in and living upon Him to find all our springs in Him, to prove Him to be our everlasting strength. Fourth, it is a humbling knowledge. This is another unmistakable effect of an immediate and supernatural revelation of God to a person. That spiritual illumination and inward teaching lays the soul low before God. Therein it differs radically from self-acquired learning and the intellectual teaching we absorb from men, for that only serves to feed our conceit: such knowledge "puffeth up" (1 Cor. 8:1). Truth itself when unapplied by the Spirit is only unsanctified knowledge, adding to our store of information but producing no lowliness of heart. But when the Lord teaches a soul, the bladder of self-sufficiency is punctured, and there is a "casting down imaginations, reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5). He now renounces his own wisdom and becomes as a "little child." The soul is brought to realize not that he is lacking in instruction, but that he is incapable of making a good use of what he already knows. He is now sensible that he needs to be Divinely taught how to effectually translate his knowledge into practice. The letter of God's precepts may be fixed in his mind, but how to perform them he knows not, and therefore does he cry, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:33), "Teach me to do Thy will" (Ps. 143:10). Of too many Laodicean "Christians" must it be said, "thy wisdom and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee [caused you to turn away]" (Isa. 47:10) from the only One who can effectually anoint blind eyes. But the wisdom which is from above is a self-emptying one, making its possessor cry, "Lord, teach me to pray" (Luke 11:1), and when he does, it is in a very different manner from the polished periods and eloquent language of what are termed pulpit "invocations." The natural man will ask for relief when in temporal distress, though he has no sense of need for spiritual mercies. But one taught of God is painfully conscious of the fact that, "he knows not what he should pray for as he ought," and has "groanings which cannot be uttered," and that makes him implore the help of the Holy Spirit. Such a one prays, "Give me understanding that I may learn Thy statutes." "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies." "Quicken Thou me in Thy way." "Teach me good judgment." "Order my steps in Thy Word and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Ps. 119:73, 40, 66, 133). Thus the soul is taught how perfectly suited is God's Word to his deep need. Fifth, it is a transforming knowledge. When God savingly reveals Himself to a person, a real and radical change is effected in him, so that the one alienated from Him is now reconciled to Him. The light of Divine grace is a prevailing and overcoming one, producing an altered disposition toward God, so that the one who shrank from Him pants after Him. Not only is Christ now feared, but adored. Divine teaching not only slays enmity against God, but conveys to the soul an answerableness to His holiness. It is affirmed of all such, "but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereto ye were delivered" (Rom. 6:17), i.e., the mold of teaching into which you have been cast. At regeneration the heart is made tender and the will tractable. The characters of the renewed are formed by the Truth—for a corresponding impression is made thereon. Their hearts and lives are modeled according to the tenor of the Gospel. Truth is received not only in the light of it, but in the love of it as well. The inward inclinations are changed and framed according to what the Word enjoins, the faculties being fitted to respond thereto. He delights in the Law of God after the inward man, and chooses the things that please God (Isa. 56:4). The sanctifying discovery of God to the soul not only slays its enmity unto Him, subdues the lusts of the flesh, removes carnal prejudices against His holy requirements, but stirs up the affections after them. No longer is there a murmuring against the exalted standard which God sets before us, but rather a reaching forth and striving to measure up to it. The Spirit's effectual application of the Word is always accompanied by a drawing out of the heart unto God, so that its subject is sensibly affected by His majesty and authority, His love and grace, His forbearance and goodness. So great was the change wrought in those who had been converted under his ministry, the Apostle could say of one company, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ

ministered [instrumentally] by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:3). And why? Because, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, they were changed "into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (v. 18): changed from pride to humility, from self-love to self-loathing, from self-seeking to Christ-pleasing. Sixth, it is an operative knowledge. There are multitudes in Christendom today who "profess they know God, but in works [not "words"] deny Him" (Titus 1:16). Much Truth has entered their ears and eyes, but it results only in idle notions, useless speculations, and frothy talk. Whereas those who by grace are made partakers of the Divine nature have a disposition and impulse unto the performance of duty, and therefore they not only long after communion with God, but diligently endeavour to please and glorify Him in their daily lives. At the new birth God puts His Law into their souls and writes it upon their hearts (Jer. 31:33), and that moves its favored recipient to exclaim "How love I Thy Law!" (Ps. 119:97), and to manifest that love by diligently seeking to comply with the Divine precepts. The Spirit is given to the elect that He may "cause them to walk in God's statutes" (Ezek. 34:27). A saving knowledge of God constrains the soul unto obedience to Him: not perfectly so in this life, yet a real responding to His requirements. No sooner did the light of God shine supernaturally into the heart of Saul of Tarsus than he cried, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Being made free from [the guilt and dominion of] sin, and became servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness" (Rom. 6:22). When the Holy Spirit effectually applies the Truth unto a person, he responds thereto: the soul is quickened and solemnized, God is revered, the affections are elevated, the will is given an inclination to deny self, renounce the world, resist the Devil. Thus it was with the Thessalonian saints: "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men; but as it is in truth, the Word of God which effectually worketh in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). It effectually prevails over sloth, the fear of man, worldly interests, everything which stands in opposition to it. "Who teacheth like Him?" (Job 36:22). Divine teaching is both efficacious and intensely practical. As God's creative words were mighty and effectual (Gen. 1), 50 are His teaching words (John 6:63; 15:3). "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). Keeping His commandments is the evidence and proof of a saving knowledge of God. Though the obedience of a Christian be far from flawless, yet is it real, spontaneous, sincere, impartial. Where no such obedience exists, then "he that saith I know Him and keepeth not His commandments [by prayerful and genuine endeavor] is a Liar" (1 John 2:4). Seventh, it is a satisfying knowledge. The language of every truly regenerated and converted soul is, I ask for no better Saviour than Christ, I desire no other peace than God's—which passes all understanding; I need no superior Director through the mazes of this world than the infallible Scriptures. Though his station in life be the humblest and meanest, the one who has been Divinely quickened would not change places with those in highest office. The one in whose heart the supernatural light of God has shone, making him wise unto salvation, counts all other knowledge as comparatively worthless. Though he be a financial pauper, yet the one who has had the scales of prejudice and unbelief removed from his eyes, and Christ "revealed in him," knows himself to be infinitely richer than the godless millionaire. The one who has had the Divine Law effectually applied to his conscience, his sins set before him in the light of God's holiness, and has found cleansing and healing in the atoning blood of the Lamb, had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the mansions of the wicked. Joint heirs with Christ envy not the great of this world; those who are clothed with His righteousness look not with grudging eye upon those clothed in silks and flashing with diamonds. Yes, this knowledge is a heart-satisfying one. It cannot be otherwise, for it is engaged with an all-sufficient Object. Nothing outside of Christ can suit the soul. Satisfaction is not to be found in ourselves, for we are mutable and dependent creatures. Nor in any of the things of time and sense, for they all perish with the using. Christ alone is the Fountain of Life and Happiness. He is all-sufficient for us, "for it hath pleased the

Father that in Him should all fullness dwell" (Col. 1:19), and therefore can He amply supply our every want. He is "altogether lovely," the perfection of beauty. He excels all on earth, out-shines all in Heaven. The infinite mind of God Himself finds contentment in the Lord Jesus, declaring Him to be "Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). Every genuinely saved person readily sets to his seal that Christ is true when He avers, "Whosoever drinketh of this Water [the failing wells of earth] shall thirst again [as Solomon found, though he drank deeply from them all]. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13, 14). A Divine discovery of the fullness, suitability, and excellence of Christ meets every need and satisfies every longing of the soul. Let every reader, as he values his soul and its eternal interests, carefully and honestly test himself by what has been set before him. As the sin of Adam could not hurt us unless he had been our head by way of generation, so the righteousness of Christ cannot enrich us unless He be our Head by regeneration. There must be union with Him before we partake of His benefits. The bands of union are life and the Spirit on His part, faith and love on ours. There is no coming and cleaving to Christ in a saving way until the soul has "learned of the Father" (John 6:45). We have described some of the characteristics and effects of that "learning." Speculative knowledge produces no spiritual fruit: no humility, no poverty of spirit, no broken-heartedness, no godly sorrow. Divine knowledge manifests a heart-searching, sin-discovering, conscience-convicting, soul-humbling, Christ-magnifying attitude. When Isaiah beheld the Holy One he exclaimed "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa. 6:5). Have you ever been brought to the place where you have made such a confession? When Daniel had a vision of the Lord with "His face as the appearance of lightning and His eyes as lamps of fire," he tells us, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (10:6, 8). Has anything resembling that been duplicated in your experience? Try yourself, we beseech you, by what has been pointed out. Assume not that all is well with you. Examine yourself, and your knowledge of Divine things. You may not know the very day of your regeneration, nor how it was brought about, but the evidences of it are apparent. Which do you really love the more: the pleasures of sin or the beauty of holiness? Which do you genuinely value most: God or the creature? Which are you actually serving: self or Christ? A sanctifying knowledge of God results in the heart being divorced from the things formerly cherished and idolized, and now cleaving to objects disliked and shunned. When the Spirit shines into the heart and reflects His own light from the Word into it, the soul is forevermore out of conceit with itself. When the Lord fully discovered Himself unto Job, he cried, "Behold, I am vile" (40:4). Have you ever been made conscious of the same thing before Him? Do you now perceive that, in yourself, you are a corrupt and polluted creature? Has the blessed Spirit made Christ real and precious to you? If so, there has been a radical change in your heart and life. When Christ was revealed to Paul, he had a contempt for all things else, ardent desires after Him, supreme delight in Him, and was willing to suffer the loss of all things for His sake (Phil. 3:8, 9). A saving knowledge of Christ gives us to prove the sufficiency of His grace, sustaining the soul amid trials (2 Cor. 12:9). "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). That which we have sought to describe is only commenced at regeneration and conversion: henceforth we are to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Our native spiritual blindness is only partly cured in this life, so that we "see through a glass darkly." Believers are still completely dependent upon the Lord that He should "open their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). They need to beg Him to make good unto them that promise, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). As the work of God is carried on in the soul, the Spirit shows him more and more what a Hell-deserving wretch he is in himself, causes him to groan frequently over his corruptions and failures, makes him more deeply sensible of his need and

suitableness unto Christ, brings him more and more in love with the Saviour, and stirs him unto an increased diligence in endeavoring to serve and honour Him. However far a saint may advance in an experiential acquaintance with Him, it is his privilege and duty to pray that he may be, "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). It is very necessary that the young Christian should clearly recognize that God's work of grace in the soul is not completed in this life. There are some of His people who look within themselves for a faith that is not hampered with unbelief, for a love that is ever warm and constant, for pantings after holiness that vary not in fervour and regularity. They look for an obedience which is well-nigh perfect, and because they are unable to find that this is their case, conclude themselves to be unregenerate. They fail to realize that the evil principle of "the flesh" is left in them, and remains unchanged unto the end. It is indeed their bounden duty to mortify its lustings and to make no provision for the same (Rom. 13:14), nevertheless, they will frequently have occasion to complain, "iniquities prevail against me" (Ps. 65:3), and daily will they need to avail themselves of that fountain opened to the Lord's people for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). If they do not, if they trifle with temptations, consort with the ungodly, allow unconfessed sins to accumulate on the conscience, they will soon relapse into a sickly state of soul, lose their relish for the things of God, have their graces languish, and then they will be unable to discern in their hearts and lives the seven marks named above. A backslider will not find the fruits of righteousness in his soul. It is also necessary to point out here that there is a radical difference between the manner of the Spirit's working in regeneration and His subsequent operations. In the former, He wrought upon us as we were "dead in sin," and consequently entirely passive therein. But after He has quickened us into newness of life, we concur with Him. That is to say, we are required to use the means of grace, especially the reading of God's Word, meditating on its contents, praying for grace to conform thereto. The blessed Spirit will set no premium on slothfulness. We are to Work, but He graciously assists: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." As we are "led by the Spirit" to walk in the paths of righteousness, conscience testifies in our favour, and "the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14, 16). But if we become careless and excuse ourselves therein, then the Spirit is grieved and obstructed, His comforts are withheld, and we taste the bitterness of our folly. The chastening rod falls on us till we repent of our waywardness and turn again unto the Lord. When matters are righted with God, the Spirit stirs us afresh to the use of means and again takes of the soul-satisfying things of Christ and shows them unto us. Finally, let it again be emphasized that all the inward teachings of God are perfectly agreeable to the written Word. The revelations made by the Spirit to the souls of God's elect and which constitute their own actual "experience," and the revelation which He has made in the sacred Scriptures never conflict (Isa. 59:21). When God speaks to the heart of man, whether it be in a way of conviction, consolation, or instruction in duty, He always honours the Bible by making express use of its words. Thus the written Word is the sole standard by which we must try all the teaching we have received: all must be weighed in the balances of the Sanctuary. "To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). Without that Divine safeguard we lay ourselves open to gross fanaticism and fatal deception. Whatever spiritual knowledge you think you have received, if it accords not wholly with God's Word, it is not of Divine revelation, but is either of human imagination or Satanic insinuation. "The Word contains the revelation of Christ; the Holy Spirit from the Word reveals Christ. In a spiritual apprehension of Him eternal life is begotten in the soul, which while it is full of Christ, yet we do not see and believe on Him to life eternal until the Lord the Spirit be our Teacher and Instructor" (S. E. Pierce). In conclusion, let us draw a few inferences from all that has been before us. (1) Herein we behold the sovereignty of God, who divides the light from the darkness as He pleases. Divine grace is discriminating (Rom. 9:18). That particularity in which Christ dealt with souls still exists: "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of

Heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11). (2) Hence we see the deep importance of distinguishing between that knowledge of the things of God which is naturally acquired and that which is Divinely taught the soul, and the need for ascertaining whether my knowledge is producing spiritual fruit in my life. It is a safe criterion to apply that whatever originates with self always aims at and terminates on self; whereas that which is from the Spirit draws out the heart and will unto Christ. (3) That those upon whom the Sun of righteousness has arisen cannot be sufficiently thankful or praise Him enough. How grateful we should be if we "know the joyful sound" (Ps. 89:15) and have found peace and joy in Christ! Well may we with wonderment exclaim, "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22). (4) Why so few who hear the Gospel are truly saved under it. How different were the effects produced by the same Seed on the several soils (Luke 8:5-8): the heart must be plowed and harrowed before it is made an "honest and good" one (v. 15). (5) Why so many keen-brained and well-educated people are left in spiritual ignorance, while simple and illiterate souls are made wise unto salvation. (6) How that the preacher is wholly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The ablest minister of the Word can no more of himself win souls to Christ than experienced fishermen could catch a single fish until He gave success (Luke 5:5). Neither the gifted Paul nor the eloquent Apollos was "anything": it is God "that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7). Often the most carefully prepared and earnestly delivered sermons produce no fruit, while a plain and ordinary one is blest of God. (7) How highly should the Christian prize the illumination of the Spirit and be looking continually to Him for instruction. He needs not a plainer Bible, but a clearer vision. I know no more of God to any good purpose than as I have been and am being taught of Him!

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