

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 12 The Spirit Enlightening

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Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 12

The Spirit Enlightening

Darkness by Nature By nature fallen man is in a state of darkness with respect unto God. Be he ever so wise, learned, and skillful in natural things, unto spiritual things he is blind. Not until we are renewed in the spirit of our minds by the Holy Spirit can we see things in God's light. But this is something which the world cannot endure to hear of, and when it be insisted upon, they will hotly deny the same. So did the Pharisees of Christ's day angrily ask, with pride and scorn, "Are we blind also?" (John 9:40), to which our Lord replied by affirming that their presumption of spiritual light and knowledge only aggravated their sin and condemnation (v. 41); unhesitatingly, He told the blind leaders of religion, that, notwithstanding all their boasting, they had never heard the Father's voice "at any time" (John 5:37). There is a twofold spiritual darkness, outward and inward. The former, is the case with those who are without the Gospel until God sends the external means of grace to them: "The people which sat in darkness saw a great light" (Matthew 4:16). The latter, is the case with all, until God the Spirit performs a miracle of grace within the soul and quickens the dead into newness of life: "And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5). No matter how well we are acquainted with the letter of Scripture, no matter how sound and faithful is the preaching we sit under and the books we read, until the soul be Divinely quickened it has no spiritual discernment or experimental perception of Divine things. Until a man be born again, he cannot "see" the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Inward Darkness: Active Opposition to God This inward darkness which fills the soul of the natural man is something far more dreadful than a mere intellectual ignorance of spiritual things. Ignorance is a negative thing, but this spiritual "darkness" is a positive thing—an energetic principle which is opposed to God. The "darkness" which rests upon the human soul gives the heart a bias toward evil, prejudicing it against holiness, fettering the will so that it never moves God-wards. Hence we read of "the power of darkness" (Col. 1:13): so great is its power that all under it love darkness "rather than light" (John 3:19). Why is it that men have little difficulty in learning a business and are quick to discover how to make money and gratify their lusts, but are stupid and unteachable in the things of God? Why is it that men are so prone and ready to believe religious lies, and so averse to the Truth? None but the Spirit can deliver from this terrible darkness. Unless the Sun of righteousness arises upon us (Mal. 4:2), we are shut up in "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13).

Because of the darkness which rests upon and reigns within his entire soul, the natural man can neither know, admire, love, adore, or serve the true God in a spiritual way. How can God appear infinitely lovely to one whose every bias of his heart prompts unto hatred of the Divine perfections? How can a corrupt soul be charmed with a Character which is the absolute opposite of its own? What fellowship can there be between darkness and Light; what concord can there be between sin and Holiness; what agreement between a carnal mind and Him against whom it is enmity? False notions of God may charm even an unregenerate heart, but none save a Divinely-quickened soul can spiritually know and love God. The true God can never appear as an infinitely amiable and lovely Being to one who is dead in trespasses and sins and completely under the dominion of the Devil. Enlightenment Presupposes Turning from Self "It is true that many a carnal man is ravished to think that God loves him, and will save him; but in this case, it is not the true character of God which charms the heart: it is not God that is loved. Strictly speaking, he can only love himself, and self-love is the source of all his affections. Or, if we call it 'love' to God, it is of no other kind than sinners feel to one another: 'for sinners also love those that love them' (Luke 6:32). The carnal Israelites gave the fullest proof of their disaffection to the Divine character (in the wilderness), as exhibited by God Himself before their eyes, yet were once full of this same kind of 'love' at the side of the Red Sea" (Joseph Bellamy). My reader, the mere fact that your heart is thrilled with a belief that God loves you, is no proof whatever that God's true character would suit your taste had you right notions of it. The Galatians loved Paul while they considered him as the instrument of their conversion; but on further acquaintance with him, they turned his enemies, for his character, rightly understood, was not at all congenial to them. If God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" and cannot but look upon sin with infinite detestation (Hab. 1:13); if all those imaginations, affections, and actions which are so sweet to the taste of a carnal heart, are so infinitely odious in the eyes of God as to appear to Him worthy of the eternal pains of Hell, then it is utterly impossible for a carnal heart to see any beauty in the Divine character until it perceives its own character to be infinitely odious. There is no spiritual love for the true God until self be hated The one necessarily implies the other. I cannot look upon God as a lovely Being, without looking upon myself as infinitely vile and hateful. When Christ said to the Pharisees, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?" (Matthew 23:33), those words determined His character in their eyes. And it implies a contradiction to suppose that Christ's character might appear lovely to them, without their own appearing odious, answerable to the import of His words. There was nothing in a Pharisee's heart to look upon his own character in such a detestable light, and therefore all the Savior's words and works could only exasperate them. The more they knew of Christ, the more they hated Him; as it was natural to approve of their own character, so it was natural to condemn His. The Pharisees were completely under the power of "darkness," and so is every human being till the Spirit quickens him into newness of life. If the fault were not in the Pharisees, it must have been in Christ; and for them to own it was not in Christ, was to acknowledge they were "vipers" and worthy of eternal destruction. They could not look upon Him as lovely, until they looked upon themselves as infinitely odious; but that was diametrically opposite to every bias of their hearts. Their old heart, therefore, must be taken away, and a new heart be given them, or they would never view things in a true light. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Enlightenment Follows Quickening "Darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2)—fallen man's state by nature. "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2)—adumbrating His initial work of quickening. "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Natural light was the first thing produced in the making of the world, and spiritual light is the first thing given at the new creation: "But God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This Divine light shining into the mind, occasions new apprehensions of what is

presented before it. Hitherto the favored subject of it had heard much about Christ: "by the hearing of the ear," but now his eye sees Him (Job 42:5): he clearly apprehends a transcendent excellence in Him, an extreme necessity of Him, a complete sufficiency in Him. "In Thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9). This is of what spiritual illumination consists. It is not a mere informing of the mind, or communication of intellectual knowledge, but an experimental and efficacious consciousness of the reality and nature of Divine and spiritual things. It is capacitating the mind to see sin in its real hideousness and heinousness, and to perceive "the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 96:9) so as to fall heartily in love with it. It is a spiritual light super-added to all the innate conceptions of the human mind, which is so pure and elevated that it is entirely beyond the power of the natural man to reach unto. It is something which the natural heart cannot even conceive of, but the knowledge of which is communicated by the Spirit's enlightenment (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). A dead man can neither see nor hear: true alike naturally and spiritually. There must be life before there can be perception: the Spirit must quicken the soul before it is capable of discerning and being affected by Divine things in a spiritual way. We say "in a spiritual way," because even a blind man may obtain an accurate idea of objects which his eye has never beheld; even so the unregenerate may acquire a natural knowledge of Divine things. But there is a far greater difference between an unregenerate man's knowledge of Divine things—no matter how orthodox and Scriptural be his views—and the knowledge possessed by the regenerate, than there is between a blind man's conception of a gorgeous sunset and what it would appear to him were sight communicated and he were permitted to gaze upon one for himself. It is not merely that the once-blind man would have a more correct conception of the Creator's handiwork, but the effect produced upon him would be such as words could not describe. The Spirit's quickening of the dead soul into newness of life lays the foundation for all His consequent operations. Once the soul is made the recipient of spiritual life, all its faculties are capacitated unto spiritual exercises: the understanding to perceive spiritually, the conscience to feel spiritually, the affections to move spiritually, and the will to act spiritually. Originally, God formed man's body out of the dust of the ground, and it then existed as a complete organism, being endowed with a full set of organs and members; but it was not until God "breathed into" him the "breath of life" (Gen. 2:7) that Adam was able to move and act. In like manner, the soul of the natural man is vested with all these faculties which distinguish him from the beasts, but it is not until the Spirit quickens him that he is capable of discerning and being affected by Divine things in a spiritual way. Once the Spirit has brought one of God's dead elect on to resurrection ground, He proceeds to illumine him. The light of God now shines upon him, and the previously-blind soul, having been Divinely empowered to see, is able to receive that light. The Spirit's enlightenment commences immediately after quickening, continues throughout the Christian's life, and is consummated in glory: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). As we stated in a previous chapter, this spiritual enlightenment is not a mere informing of the mind or communication of spiritual knowledge, but is an experimental and efficacious consciousness of the Truth. It is that which is spoken of in 1 John 2:20, 27, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things . . . But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you." Manifestations of 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." Characteristics of Enlightenment In closing, let us seek to define a little more definitely some of the characteristics of this Divine enlightenment. First, it is one which gives certainty to the soul. It enables its favored possessor to say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). And again, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). Later, Satan may be permitted to inject unbelieving and atheistic thoughts into his mind, but it is utterly impossible for him to persuade any quickened and enlightened soul that God has no existence, that Christ is a myth, that the Scriptures are a human invention. God in Christ has become a living reality to him, and the more He appears to the soul the sum of all excellence, the more is He loved. Second, this Divine enlightenment is transforming. Herein it differs radically from a natural knowledge of Divine things, such as the unregenerate may acquire intellectually, but which produces no real and lasting impression upon the soul. A spiritual apprehension of Divine things is an efficacious one, stamping the image thereof upon the heart, and molding it into their likeness: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus this spiritual illumination is vastly different from a mere notional and inoperative knowledge of Divine things. The Spirit's enlightenment enables the Christian to "show forth the praises of him who hath called him out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Third, this Divine enlightenment is a spiritual preservative. This is evident from 1 John 2:20, though to make it fully clear unto the reader an exposition of that verse in the light of its context is required. In 1 John 2:18 the Apostle had mentioned the "many antichrists" (to be headed up in the antichrist), which were to characterize this final dispensation: seducers from the Faith were numerous even before the close of the first century AD. In 1 John 2:19 reference is made to those who had fallen under the spell of these deceivers, and who had in consequence, apostatized from Christianity. In sharp contrast therefrom, the Apostle affirms, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (v. 20). Here was the Divine preservative: the Spirit's enlightenment ensured the saints from being captured by Satan's emissaries. Apostates had never been anointed by the Spirit; renewed souls are, and this safeguards them. The voice of a stranger "will they not follow" (John 10:5). It

is not possible to fatally "deceive" one of God's elect (Matthew 24:24). The same precious truth is found again in 1 John 2:27: the Spirit indwells the Christian "forever" (John 14:16), hence the "anointing" he has received "abideth in him" and thus guarantees that he shall "abide in Christ."

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