

The Eyes Opened to the Law of God Pt.--2

by Charles Finney

To experience divine illumination, one must believe in the doctrine of divine illumination, strongly desire divine light, and be willing to encounter all consequences.

Scripture: Psalm 119:18, Matthew 7:7, James 1:5

Topics: "Spiritual Understanding", "Divine Illumination"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of divine illumination to truly understand the Bible, urging believers to recognize their spiritual blindness and to earnestly seek God's light. He outlines conditions for receiving this illumination, including a strong desire for understanding, perseverance in prayer, and a willingness to abandon distractions that hinder spiritual growth. Finney illustrates the importance of approaching Scripture with a child-like disposition and warns against the dangers of misinterpretation and delusion. He encourages believers to pray for their eyes to be opened to behold the wondrous truths of God's law, highlighting the transformative power of the Spirit in understanding Scripture.

Transcript

"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."--Psalm 119:18

V. The conditions on which an answer to the request in the text may be expected.

1. We must believe that there are such wondrous things in the Bible, and that God is able and willing to reveal them to us. We must believe in the doctrine of this discourse, to wit, that without divine illumination shed on the Bible by the Spirit, we cannot understand the truths thereof, and that God can so enlighten us as really to make us behold wonderful things, new and before unknown, things hidden from those whom the Spirit does not enlighten,--in short, we must believe that the Bible needs to be revealed, that it is not sufficient that these words be written down, and that we read these sentences, but that there must be a personal application and revelation to us, by the Spirit, in order to get beyond the letter which killeth, unto the Spirit which giveth life.

2. A sense of our great ignorance, and spiritual blindness. No man will make this petition unless he feels that he is exceedingly blind; unless he realizes that he needs the divine illumination, and how great his darkness is, and his ignorance of the spiritual truths of the gospel, he never will have the enlightening of the Spirit.

3. We must strongly desire this divine light. It must be the leading, controlling desire of the mind, our soul must be pressed down with our ignorance, and drawn out in mighty supplications, with strong crying and tears, that God will give us light. The Prophet says, 'And ye shall seek me, and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart.' There must be such a longing, the soul so set upon it, as that the soul cries out after God. We need to be much in the state of mind in which blind Bartimeus was, that most affecting case, so graphically described that you seem to see it acted before your eyes. Jesus was passing along with a great multitude around Him, it was all excitement, they came into a village, a blind man sits by the side of the way, where he has often sat before. Bartimeus sits there, as in the East is common to this day--to this day you may see poor creatures blind and lame lying by the way side, half-naked, famishing, dying, and frequently no more notice taken of them than if they were so many beasts--there he sits to beg--he has heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and of his wonderful kindness, and his wonderful cures, and he longs to see Him. Well, Bartimeus hears the noise--he asks, What is it? 'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.' He is all on fire--'Jesus, JESUS, thou Son of David have mercy on me.' 'Hush, hush, be still, don't make such an outcry.' He cried the louder, 'Jesus, Jesus, O Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' He must be heard, there was a great throng and much noise and he must be heard--he was blind and he must have his sight restored. Jesus could do it and he must gain his ear--he would be heard--when they told him to be quiet he only cried the louder. But Christ heard him. Who is that? A blind man, Lord, nobody but a poor blind beggar. Bring him hither to me. And Bartimeus leaped forth, and they brought him to Jesus. What wilt thou that I should do unto thee, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And now mark, see the sweet mercy of the Savior, he restored his sight immediately.

Now you must feel as Bartimeus did, you must have the confidence that he had--for see the confidence Bartimeus had, he believed Jesus could heal him, and he wished to afford Him the opportunity. O, if he could but find Him, and when Jesus came that way how he cried out. And so you must feel as to your spiritual sight--that it must be obtained.

4. A willingness to encounter all the consequences. Some of the consequences I have told you already. You must be willing to encounter all the consequences, or you cannot be the subjects of the divine illumination.

5. We must persevere in faith and asking--for we may not be enlightened at first, any more than the Syrophenician woman was answered at first. Many mistakenly suppose that the very first exercise of faith brings, in their fulness, the blessings promised to faith. But not so. The Syrophenician woman must ask again and again. Jacob wrestled all night with the angel even till break of day. God has his reasons for delay, and they are good ones no doubt, and we should not think the answer will surely come instantly, on the exercise of faith, nor because the answer does not come immediately should we think we do not pray in faith, but we must press our suit, and hold on, and cling to the promises.

6. Right motives in asking. Not mere curiosity, but a desire really and truly to glorify God thereby, a desire for the light that we may walk in it, that we may glorify God and hold up the true light in our conduct, by our spirit, our manner, our preaching, our everything. If we have unholy motives in asking it, we shall not obtain the light, we may be well assured.

7. We must search the Scriptures, if we would expect the light of the Spirit poured upon their pages.

8. We must give up those pursuits, that reading, those objects, which divert our attention, and prevent us from giving our whole souls to the Bible. While our minds are drawn off from the Bible by other things,

while we are interested in those authors whose spirit is as directly opposite to that of the Bible as heaven is to hell, how can we hope to have the enlightenment of the Spirit? There is a class of writings, which, in their influence, make the soul totally blind to the glories of the Scriptures--it cannot receive them in such a state of mind. If you give yourself to search for the spirit of Byron, that spirit will come upon you with little effort on your part. It is so congenial to the heart in its selfishness and passion, it will fall upon you without being prayed for. But the Spirit of God will never enlighten you, never. I believe it to be an unalterable condition of communion with the Spirit, that the mind must be broken off from communion with such corrupt and corrupting authors. You must break loose from them, or you will never enjoy the sweet light of God's Spirit.

9. You must avail yourselves of all the aids within your reach, which will lead you to a right understanding of the Scriptures. I do not mean that a man may not understand the Bible, and have the spiritual illumination in the absence of commentaries and of a knowledge of the original languages; he may get a spiritual acquaintance with the Bible without these, if he give himself thereto with a right spirit, that is, if these helps are out of reach. But if a man can avail himself of the opinions of learned and godly men, he should do so; if he can gain a knowledge of the original tongues, he should do so; if in any other way he can get help from his fellow men, let him do so, remembering meanwhile, that these are by no means indispensable to such a knowledge as is necessary to usefulness and salvation, but very useful in their place, when they can be obtained, and therefore should be used with thanksgiving. If God places you out of reach of all these, then He will enlighten you without their aid, but if they are within your reach, He will not teach you independently of them, those things which are appropriately to be learned from them.

10. It is necessary that we become child-like in our disposition. Now God does not teach, I suppose, by miraculous interposition, properly so called, but when the mind is in a child-like state, the way is open for the Spirit to present the glorious truth, and for the mind naturally to apprehend its deep and transcendent import. The eye then is open, and ready for the light to be shed upon the objects of spiritual vision. But if the mind be committed, if there be a determination to see things just so and no otherwise, we never shall be able to see the truth as it is in Jesus. I pass to make several

REMARKS.

1. I notice the danger there is in preaching some of the spiritual truths of the Bible. Not that they tend in themselves to produce mischief, but, men being as they are, those truths will by very many, certainly be perverted. This has always been true, and it is true in respect to many doctrines. Justification by faith--salvation by grace--have they not been sadly perverted? Yet they are most precious doctrines. So the doctrine of spiritual illumination. Many will go straight into delusion under such a discourse as I have preached, or make it the occasion of confirming their minds in a previous delusion. Many will seize hold of some one or other of the consequences I have enumerated of spiritual illumination, and finding such a fact in their own case, they will conclude they are surely divinely enlightened. I said that those who are divinely illuminated will differ much in their views from others, that their views will be reckoned peculiar and wonderful, that they will be thought deranged, that they will be persecuted. Now we differ from those about us--we are counted strange and fanatical--they call us crazy or chatter-brained--we are persecuted for our opinions and conduct--therefore we are spiritually enlightened. The doctrines of spiritual religion will certainly be abused--but that is no reason why they should not be preached. They are the food of the saints--the bread of their souls--and shall it be withheld? If others will abuse them, who can help it? They must not be withheld from the true saints who are panting after them, because some will abuse them, and so be lost thereby. It is the less of two evils to preach them for the good of the true saints, though

incidental evils result to some, than to withhold them and starve the souls of the faithful and thus curse the world. I have often seen persons confirming themselves in delusion in this way. I know not how many times in reference to this very subject, when I have met with persons laboring under curious delusions, and have expostulated with them, they have quoted my own sermons and writings in support of their fantasies. They will say, you used to preach that men might be taught of God. Yes, I preach the same doctrine now. But because a man may be taught of God, does it follow that you are taught of God in your strange vagaries? Because you may have your eyes opened so as to behold wondrous things out of God's law, is it certain that your wondrous things are contained in the Bible? A certain class of minds will almost surely be deluded, and this most likely to their ruin. To such God says by the prophet, 'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand--ye shall lie down in sorrow.'

2. Many persons will be led astray in another direction by this subject. Becoming greatly wrought upon, they get a wrong idea, and seek for immense excitement. You are to seek with all earnestness, but the thing which you are to seek is not feeling, but light, substantial light shed upon the pages of the Bible.

3. Where persons give themselves up to seek states of feeling, and to be carried away by a flood of emotion, it will always react, and create abundant mischief. Men need to be baptized with the Holy Ghost, and if they give themselves to anything else, it may cause much noise and vociferation, but it will never lead them to the state in which they are 'light in the Lord.'

4. I understand this divine illumination to be a special gift from God--not the gift of miracles--not conversion. The Apostles had it on the day of Pentecost. It is generally included in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is given in different degrees, and at different times. Men need it again and again, and more and more of it. Persons who have been enlightened need still greater illuminations as they go forward.

5. Those whose eyes are not opened are very liable to speak 'evil of things which they understand not,' and thus wound their own souls and grieve the Spirit of God. It grieves me much to see persons stumbled at things, merely because they are in advance of their experience. I will mention a case. A man, an elder in the Presbyterian church, who had been such for nearly half a century, and who thought all religious excitement fanaticism, was present at a meeting during a revival in a neighboring church. The [S]pirit of God came down with power. The elder was much disturbed. At the close, a person in the assembly sank down to the earth overcome with the power of conviction. The elder cried out angrily, 'Get thee behind me Satan.' Where is that man now? He opposes every thing that is good--all reformations, all progress of good, in a most obstinate and self-willed S[s]pirit, and is left apparently to his own destruction. Many do not, I know, go so far as this; but it is astonishing to see how men will speak evil of things which they understand not. It will be well for such to read the solemn words of the Apostle Peter. 'These as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speaking evil of the things they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption, and shall receive the reward of their unrighteousness.' It is one of the great dangers to which men are exposed, to oppose, and reject, and speak evil of things simply because the things are beyond their own experience. They seem to think they know all that can be known, and any thing else is fanaticism of course. Persons often treat as foolish, and visionary, and childish, and contemptible, the higher states of Christian experience, and only because they themselves have not advanced so far. You should be careful, brethren, lest you speak evil of and reject those very things which you must know if you are ever saved.

6. The spiritual members of the Church have always been persecuted by the body of the church. The Bible will tell you so, and all history declares the same thing. The most spiritual ministers and members have always been misunderstood and persecuted by those who are not spiritual.

7. This should not discourage you from seeking spirituality, nor from being spiritual. And, moreover, spiritual persons will neither be surprised nor offended thereby. They can understand very well why others speak evil and oppose. The spiritual man discerneth all things, but he himself is discerned by no man. The Bible teaches this, and he sees why it is so; he sees why they account him a heretic, and are afraid of him; he sees where they are, but they do not see where he is; he understands their darkness better than they understand his light.

8. The subject accounts for much of the difference of opinion as the meaning of the Bible. There always will be differences of opinion. It is absurd to think that there can be any system of opinions stereo-typed, and believed alike by the young convert and the adult Christian. What, must men have the full knowledge of the Bible when they are first converted? Are men to make no advances in knowledge of divine things? How are stewards to bring from their treasure things new and old? Then, must nothing new be brought forward? O no. You must learn nothing new--must find nothing which is not in the standards. It is to be taken for granted that a thing is wrong of course, if it is not in the standards. It is true, indeed that all will agree in certain doctrines. But it by no means follows that every one will hold all that is taught in the Bible; neither is it true that men may not be real Christians, and yet be ignorant of many very precious truths taught in the Bible.

9. We all see why so many persons are not deeply interested in the Bible. They have not their eyes opened, have not the divine light shining upon it to make it interesting to them. They are like persons passing a most beautiful region in the dark. They see no beauty, they have no light. Without this light from God, the Bible is a sealed book, and for all spiritual matters of no benefit. And the reading of it for such a purpose, is as dull a work as one can well be engaged in. A man will read his chapter, and five minutes afterwards he knows nothing of what he read. But with the Spirit, the Bible is a world of wonders; it is a mine of gold, exhaustless; you may dig, and dig, and the deeper you do, only the richer will it become.

10. You may see the reason why ministers, and young men preparing for the ministry, are so little interested in making the Bible their study. They lack the divine light that makes it all glorious within, that leads them into the depths of its hidden meaning.

11. Where men possess this divine light, you will never hear them pleading the necessity of reading other books to give the mind proper recreation. If they read other literature at all, it will be not for amusement, but for information. Such a man will not feel bound to read Shakespeare and Scott. He will draw away from them as from an ocean of filth. I may say without extravagance, that to him whose eyes are opened, the Bible will prove a more fertile source of improvement, both moral and intellectual, a more powerful spring of mental action than all other books put together. It opens up a world of thoughts on almost every subject, it starts ten thousand trains; you tread as it were upon enchanted ground, whole masses of thought constantly rising from the bosom of the great ocean of truth; the Psalms, the Prophets, all point you to every part of the universe, the heaven, the earth, and the sea. But without the Spirit, the Bible is bereft of this power.

12. It is true, I believe, that the more of the divine illumination Christians enjoy, the less they read of any thing else than the Bible. Or if they read other things, it is because it will throw light upon, or because the

spirit of the works is like the spirit of the blessed Bible. Ask the oldest saint, if he is not tired of his Bible. Tired of my Bible? My Bible? It is more and more my book every year I live. But have you not read it through and through? Yes, but it grows richer and richer every time I go through it. But do you not understand it all? Ah, I learn something continually. I learn more now at a reading than when I first began. Now I know no end to this progression in divine knowledge, for the spiritual mind. The [S]pirit keeps bringing up without end, new, and more exquisite, and glorious displays of the things of God's law. The soul drinks and drinks, and drinks again, and the ocean is never exhausted.

13. Spiritual guides whose eyes are not opened are blind leaders of the blind. I do not mean that a man must have all light in order to be a guide at all, a man may guide as far as he knows the way himself, but without enlightenment he can lead but a little way. A vast many ministers are so blind that they can lead but a little way. Many cannot even bring sinners into the kingdom, they have not knowledge enough of the way to carry a sinner into the kingdom and set him down within the gate. Others can take them through the gate, but can guide them little further. Ministers will labor in their way for years and years, and their church will make little progress or none at all. The reason is, their own eyes are not open, and what they do not know they cannot tell to others.

14. You see the importance that ministers shall insist that God shall open their eyes, to enable them to behold wondrous things out of his law. A young man who is called to preach, may urge that call before the Lord as a valid reason for the illumination of the Spirit, and he is bound to urge his call. O God, hast thou set me a watchman upon Zion's wall, and wilt thou not open my eyes. O, how blind I am! how blind the flock are! how they need enlightenment, my Father open thou mine eyes. A minister ought to press this, and insist on it, and every candidate for the ministry should press it. The Church ought to pray with earnestness that God will open the eyes of their spiritual guides. And every Christian too, ought to pray for enlightenment, that he for himself, may understand the holy word.

15. Many pray to be enlightened who will not fulfill the conditions, who will not give up their own ends, and cast away their prejudices. Of course they remain in the dark.

16. Many mistake and suppose they are enlightened when they are not. They do thus--They desire a certain thing to be true. They take the Bible and endeavor to make it support their loved doctrine, till at length they seem to see its truth written every where. By long labor the doctrine has become coupled by association with a multitude of passages. Now they are enlightened. O yes, it [is] as clear as day. No, but they are not enlightened. They are much mistaken. Let me give an illustration, a curious case enough. I received a book, not long since, directed to me with all gravity, as if a revelation from heaven itself. The book is the work of some of the people called Shakers, and it claims to be a revelation from God, to the effect that Christ has come the second time, and that in the person of Ann Lee. In that book a great many passages are adduced to maintain the proposition that Christ's second advent must be in the person of a woman! And all this by the teaching of the divine Spirit! Men think they have the witness of the Holy Ghost to a thing when they have no witness of the Holy Ghost to that thing. Bro. Charles Fitch professed to have the witness of the Spirit that the second advent of Christ with the end of the world would occur in 1843. But he was mistaken, as he also is in respects to the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked. O brethren, do not mistake the persuasions of a heart set in falsehood, nor the vagaries of a fanatical brain for the teachings of the Holy Ghost.

17. Many persons do not care enough about understanding the Bible, to give themselves to pray for the light of the Spirit. They have no longing to know what is in the Bible. I know what that indifference is, and I

know too what it is to cry out from the bottom of my soul, O God, open my eyes. Listen to the Psalmist. As the hart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come to appear before God! Is there any fanaticism there, my brethren? Look at that figure--the poor, tired hart, its tongue out, panting, leaping, and panting, in the desert, and no water. Is there not earnestness there? So interested must you be, your heart panting after God, crying out after Him.

Brethren, there are glorious things in the Bible--wondrous things in God's law--we need the Spirit to open our eyes that we may behold them. To obtain that light we need to pray the prayer of our text--"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Will you give yourselves to pray and seek the Lord, for the light of his Spirit to shine upon the word, to enlighten our eyes, and make us know God's holy truth?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-eyes-opened-to-the-law-of-god-pt-2/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net