

The Work of the Spirit in Enlightening the Mind

[James Buchanan](#)

James Buchanan was born in 1804. He held several pastorates before becoming Professor Apologetics and later of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College in Edinburgh. He attained great fame as a preacher, his manner in the pulpit being marked by sustained clarity of thought and eloquent evangelical fervour. The most experimental of Buchanan's theological works is the one from which this article is taken, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit*, which was first published in 1843 and then republished by the *Banner of Truth Trust* in 1966.

HAVING considered the general design of the gift of the Spirit, in reference both to the world and the Church, and described the course or process by which a soul is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, I propose to illustrate separately the various parts of the Spirit's work, or his successive operations on the soul, from the time when it is first taken under his teaching, till it is made 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.'

One of his most necessary operations is that by which he conveys *spiritual light into the understanding*; and to this part of his work, which is indeed so important, that it is often put for the whole, the apostle refers, when, speaking of the Holy Ghost as 'the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,' he prays that by the Spirit 'the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened' (Eph. i. 17, 18), and when he describes true converts as having had their eyes opened, and having been turned from darkness to light; nay, translated out of darkness into God's marvellous light.

The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit may be said to be the groundwork of all his other operations; for it is by the truth known and believed that the Spirit fulfils all the functions of his glorious office.¹ By enlightening the mind in the knowledge of sin, he lays a groundwork for the *conviction* of conscience; by enabling us to see the import and meaning of the Gospel, he proposes motives for *conversion*; by teaching us right views of God and of ourselves, our privileges and prospects, he supplies us with means of *comfort*; by showing us the nature and necessity of Gospel holiness, he carries forward the work of *sanctification*; by disclosing to us scriptural views of our spiritual necessities,

¹ On this important subject, the author refers his readers to a Treatise by Jonathan Edwards, on 'The Reality of Spiritual Light.' *Works*, vol. viii. p. 5? Thomas Halyburton on 'The Nature of Faith;' and John Owen's Discourses on 'The Reason of Faith;' and 'The Causes, Ways and Means of Understanding the Word of God.' *Works*, vol. vi.

he calls forth the *spirit of prayer*; and, generally, he does whatever he is wont to do, by means of the *knowledge*. Hence it is important to give due consideration to this part of the Spirit's work, that we may be prepared to understand, and rightly to improve, whatever we shall find revealed respecting his other operations on the soul. Such, indeed, is the inseparable connection, or rather the real affinity of all the saving graces of the Spirit, that none of them can exist without being accompanied or followed by all the rest; and hence any one of them may be used to signify the presence of all. Thus, *knowledge, faith, repentance, and love* are severally spoken of in Scripture as either comprehending or implying every thing that is essential to a sinner's salvation; and hence a full exposition of any one of these fruits of the Spirit might embrace a description of the whole of the Spirit's work. It is not, then, with the view of separating betwixt them, or assigning the precise order of their production, that we distinguish one part of the Spirit's work from another; but rather with the view of unfolding it, in all the magnitude of its extent, and the variety of its aspects, as it is exhibited in the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit is the enlightener of God's people, and imparts *spiritual illumination* to their minds.

This part of the Spirit's work implies a *previous state of spiritual darkness* on the part of those who are the subjects of it; and the natural state of all men is very frequently represented under the figures of darkness, blindness, and ignorance. They are described as 'walking in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' And again, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.'

Here observe, that this spiritual darkness is *universal*; it is affirmed of all the Gentiles, and we shall find that it is also affirmed of all the unbelieving Jews: it belongs to the 'natural man,' or to every man as he is by nature. It is not dispelled by those common notions of God and divine things, which an unrenewed mind may acquire in the exercise of its own faculties. Nor is its prevailing power disproved by the existence of these notions, any more than the prevailing power of sin is disproved by the existence of some notions of the difference betwixt right and wrong. Nay, as in nature itself there is 'no darkness without a mixture of light,'² such light as serves only to make 'the darkness visible,' so is it with the unrenewed soul; its common notions of God are not sufficient to dispel the darkness in which it is shrouded; and hence the apostle, in one place, declares, that when 'men *knew* God, they glorified him not as God;' and, regarding this as a proof that there was some radical defect in their knowledge of him, he speaks of it elsewhere as if it were no knowledge at all; for, says he, 'the world by wisdom *knew not* God.' And may we not apply to these common notions, which have nothing in them of the true celestial light, the solemn remark of our Lord himself, 'If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!' This darkness does not consist merely in the

² Howe, *Works*, viii., 566.

absence of outward light, but in the 'blindness of the mind' such blindness as obstructs the entrance of the light, even when it is shining gloriously around us. Thus, of the unbelieving Jews it is said, that they remained in spiritual darkness with the revelation of God in their hands: 'But their minds were *blinded*: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.' (2 Cor. 3. 14-16). A two-fold veil is here spoken of — the one which covered the Old Testament, before the advent of Christ, by whom it was explained as well as fulfilled; and the other which lay upon their own souls, and which prevented them from seeing, even when the first 'veil was done away in Christ.' And so, of multitudes who live in the full blaze of Gospel light, it is said, that they remain inwardly in a state of spiritual darkness; for 'if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' (2 Cor. 4. 3, 4). If this spiritual darkness be natural to all men, and if it may exist notwithstanding the common notions of God and religion which they may acquire by their natural faculties, and notwithstanding the still higher instruction of the written Word; it follows that it can only be removed by an inward operation on the mind itself, and this is expressly ascribed to the enlightening influence of the Spirit. 'The Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.' If we would 'with open or unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord,' it must be 'as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

Accordingly, the change which is wrought in the mind at the time of its conversion is compared to a transition from darkness to light, or to the change of night into day. It is said of the Father, that 'he hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son;' that 'he hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light;' and of Christ, that he commissioned Paul 'to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God:' but that this was not to be accomplished by mere human teaching appears from that striking passage where God speaks of it as his own peculiar work, and intimates that it could be accomplished by no other than that creative power which, 'when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,' spoke saying, 'Let there be light, and there was light;' for says the apostle, '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.' And then will the wondering disciple exclaim, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'

This great change is ascribed to the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit on the soul. It is ascribed, indeed, to the Father, as 'the fountain of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift;' and to the Son also, as the anointed Prophet of the Church, 'the light of the world;' but it is the Holy Spirit, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, by whose immediate personal agency this illumination of the mind is wrought. Our Lord himself promised to send the Spirit as an Enlightener. 'When he, the *Spirit of truth*, is come, he will guide you into all truth.' 'He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine,

and shall *show* it unto you.' 'The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall *teach* you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.' And that this precious promise was not personal to the apostles, nor limited to the primitive Church, appears from the preceding context: 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for *ever*, even the Spirit of truth;' by whose constant presence and continued grace in the Church, he fulfils that other promise, 'Lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world.'

There are various distinct operations of the Holy Spirit as the Enlightener of the soul. (1) As the *revealer* of the truth, by whom it was made known to the prophets, evangelists, and apostles, — for 'holy men of old *spake* as they were moved by the *Holy Ghost*.' 'God hath *revealed* them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' (2) As the Author of the Scriptures, inspiring the prophets, evangelists, and apostles to write what should be preserved and recorded for the conviction of the world, and the comfort of the Church, in all ages, for 'all Scripture was given by his inspiration.' So that every individual stands indebted to the Holy Ghost for every ray of light that has ever beamed on his understanding from the page of Scripture. The Bible is the Spirit's message; it is the textbook which he has provided for the Church. (3) But there is, and must be, a more direct operation of the Holy Spirit on every human soul that is enlightened by his truth. It is not enough that he has revealed the truth to his apostles, and that he has embodied and preserved it in an authentic Bible. The *glorious light* may *shine around us*, without shining *into our hearts*. There is a defective vision that must be cured, a blind eye that must be opened, a veil that must be taken away, a thick darkness within, which must be dispelled by his creative mandate, 'Let there be light.' Notwithstanding all the abundance of Gospel light, it is still true as it ever was, that 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God'; 'that no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him;' and that he is often pleased 'to hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes.'

The *Word of God* is the *instrument*, the *Spirit of God* is the *agent*, in this great work of illumination. The Bible is the textbook, but the Spirit is himself the teacher. He is not only the author of that book, but the interpreter of it also, who guides us into a knowledge of its truths. He puts the Bible into our hands, as a 'light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path;' but, knowing that we are naturally blind, and cannot see afar off, he opens our eye and shines into our heart. All the truth which the Spirit ever teaches is *in* the Word; but never would it find *entrance* into our hearts unless he put it there. The Word is a *sword* — a sharp two-edged sword; but its efficacy depends on this — that it is the sword of the Spirit. The Word is alight; but it is 'in *his light* we see light.' 'The entrance of his Word giveth light;' but it obtains entrance only when 'he openeth the heart.' Hence the prayer of the Psalmist, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law;' and the still more remarkable prayer of the apostle, 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be *strengthened with might* by his Spirit in the inner man.' Here is a powerful work of the Spirit on the soul; it must be strengthened

with might. And for what end? 'That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.' Here no new truth is said to be revealed; but what is contained in the Word is made known by the inward enlightening of the Holy Spirit.

On the *teaching of the Spirit the efficacy of all the means of grace depends*, and especially the efficacy of the reading and preaching of the Word. Without the Spirit the ministry of the Word would be utterly fruitless for all the ends of saving conversion. It might be a social blessing, as a means of keeping alive a sense of common morality in the world, but never could it be the means of spiritual life to the soul, unless it were accompanied with the enlightening grace of the Spirit. What more powerful than the ministry of the apostles? what reasoning more vigorous, what appeals more overwhelming, what eloquence more lofty, what zeal more urgent, than those of Paul? What love so tender, what tenderness so pathetic, what pathos so touching, what unction so rich and sweet, as those of John? What sacred orator better furnished for his vocation than Apollos, of whom it is written, that 'he was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures'? Yet even the ministry of inspired men, the preaching of the very apostles of Christ, depended for all its saving efficacy on the grace of the Spirit; for, says the apostle, 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.' 'We are labourers together with God; but ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.' Ministers are often employed as *instruments* in enlightening and converting the soul; and hence they may be said, ministerially, to be the spiritual fathers of their converts. Yet it is not by their own power, but by the power of the Holy Ghost; so that every successful minister might well say with the apostles, 'Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly upon us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?' This great truth, if it shows the weakness of the minister, will also prove the very strength of his ministry; for never will he feel so deeply impressed either with the greatness of his work, or the dignity of his mission, as when he is most thoroughly convinced that the efficacy of all his preaching depends on the power of the Spirit. This will nerve him with new strength, and inspire him with new hope, when all outward appearances are most unpromising; and in the strength of this simple faith, he will stand prepared to deliver his message, before any audience, savage or civilized, assured that the same Spirit who has brought the truth home to his own soul, can also bring it home, with demonstration and power, both to the obtuse and unlettered peasant, and to the refined, perhaps the sceptical, or the scornful man of science.

Further, the Word, the ministry, and other means of instruction, are adapted to the rational nature of man, and are in their own nature fitted for the purpose for which they are employed; nay, men may, in the use of their natural faculties, be instructed, impressed, and affected by the reading and hearing of the Word; but they cannot be *savingly enlightened* without the teaching of the Spirit.

The Spirit's operations are adapted to the nature of man as a rational and intelligent being; and he works in and by the faculties of the soul. It is the *same mind* which is now in darkness that is to be translated into marvellous light; the same understanding which is now ignorant that is to be informed; the same eye which is now blind that is to be opened and enabled to see. — The Spirit usually exerts his power by the use of *appropriate means*. Omitting from our present consideration the case of infants, who may be sanctified from the womb by the secret operations of the Spirit, it is clear that in the case of adults, the mind is enlightened instrumentally by the truth, which is hence called 'the light of the glorious gospel,' and the 'day-star which rises on the heart.' The Word of God is an *appropriate means of enlightening* the mind; it is an instrument which is in every respect fitted for the purpose for which it is employed. (i Tim. 3. 14). If any remain in darkness with the Bible in their hands, it is not because there is no light in the Bible, but because there is no spiritual eye to discern it. All the truth which an enlightened believer ever earns under the teaching of the Spirit is really contained in the Bible, although heretofore he had not seen it there: nay, much of it may have been contained in the articles of his professed creed; but it was not known, understood, and believed in its full spiritual meaning as it is now. He is only brought, in many cases, to see what he formerly professed to believe in a new *light*, so as to understand and feel its spiritual import and power, as the truth of God.

Being an appropriate means, adapted to the faculties of the human mind, there can be no reason to doubt that the Bible, like any other book, may convey much instruction to an unrenewed man. When it is affirmed that a natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit of God, it is not implied that the Bible is unintelligibly written, or that he cannot understand the sense and meaning of scriptural propositions, so as to be able to give a rational account of them; for he may investigate the literal meaning of Scripture, and, in doing so, may attach a definite idea to many of its statements — may be able to see their mutual relations — to reason upon them, and even to expound them; and yet, in the scriptural sense, he may be in darkness notwithstanding. There are truths in the Bible which admit of being recognized, and even proved by natural reason, 'for the things of a man may be known by the spirit of man which is in him;' and even 'the things of the Spirit,' when revealed, may be so far understood as to affect and impress the mind which is nevertheless unconverted. The Pharisees had 'the form of knowledge in the law;' they were the great theologians under the Old Testament. Yet our Lord declares, that, studious and instructed as they were, and capable of expounding the writings of Moses, they did not really *know* God, nor understand the writings of Moses. Simon Magus must have had some correct notional acquaintance with the leading truths of the Gospel, and must have been able to put them forth in intelligible propositions, when he made that profession of faith which the apostles themselves regarded as a sufficient ground for his admission to the sacrament of baptism. Yet he had not been spiritually enlightened, for 'he was still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.' So our Lord himself speaks of some who hear the Word, and anon with joy receive it. They not only have some notion of its meaning, but some impressions of its power; yet they have not the 'light of life.' They are like Herod, 'who feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.' There is a great difference betwixt the

views even of *natural men* on the subject of divine truth, a difference which is strikingly exemplified by the very different language of *the three Roman governors*, Festus, Agrippa, and Felix, in reference to the preaching of Paul. Festus spoke out in the bold language of a natural man, to whom the preaching of the Gospel was *foolishness* 'Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad.' Agrippa was impressed and moved, for he said, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;' and was still more deeply moved, for, 'as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix *trembled*.' The natural man, then, may know something of divine truth, — he may even be impressed and affected by it, without acquiring that *saving knowledge* which our Lord himself declares to be 'eternal life.'

The natural man is capable of acquiring, by the use of his rational faculties, such an acquaintance with the truths of God's Word as is sufficient to *make him responsible* for his treatment of it. Not to enlarge upon other points, let us take the doctrine which affirms the darkness of the human understanding, and the necessity of the enlightening grace of the Holy Spirit, which is often supposed to destroy the grounds of human responsibility in this respect; unless he be taught of God, he cannot have such an experimental knowledge of that doctrine as belongs to the exercised believer, and probably he will not submit to it; but it is stated, nevertheless, in plain intelligible language. He cannot read his Bible without being made aware that it contains this truth, nor can he exercise his understanding upon it, without acquiring some general knowledge of its import; and that knowledge, although neither spiritual nor saving, is amply sufficient as a ground of moral obligation. And farther, he may also learn from the same source, and in the same way, how it is that the enlightening grace of the Spirit is obtained, for he cannot read such passages as these: 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him;' and, 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' — he cannot read such passages as these without forming some notion of prayer as the means by which his natural darkness may be dispelled; and if, notwithstanding his clear natural perception of such doctrines, he either refuses to believe them, or persists in neglecting prayer for the Holy Spirit, he must be dealt with hereafter on a very different principle, and tried by a very different rule of judgment from that which alone is applicable to those who have no Bible to teach them, or no rational mind to be taught. You cannot have sat under a Gospel ministry for years without acquiring such knowledge as is abundantly sufficient to lay you under the most weighty responsibilities. It is a solemn reflection, that this knowledge must either prove 'the savour of life unto life,' or 'the savour of death unto death.' If it be not the means of your *conversion*, it will be the ground of your *condemnation*, 'For this is the condemnation, that light hath come into the world, and that men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. But he that loveth the light cometh to the light;' and he that loveth the light of the Gospel will not shrink from the enlightening work of the Spirit.

Still, it must ever be remembered, that whatever knowledge a natural man may acquire by the exercise of his rational faculties on the Word of God, that knowledge is neither spiritual nor saving, unless he be enlightened by the Spirit. Were I asked to state what is

the specific difference betwixt the natural and the spiritual knowledge of divine truth, or how they may best be distinguished from each other, I should feel the difficulty that is usually attendant on a discrimination betwixt two states of mind, which have some common resemblance, and whose difference consists in a quality of which the natural man knows nothing, because he has no experience of it. As it is difficult to convey an idea of colour to the blind, or of music to the deaf, so it is difficult to describe to a natural man the Peculiar perceptions of one whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit. And the difficulty is not diminished but increased by the fact, that he has a kind of knowledge which is common to him with the true believer, and which is too apt to be mistaken for that which the Gospel requires. Perhaps the nearest approach that we can make to an explanation may be by asking you to conceive of a man who sees, but has no sense of beauty, or of a man who hears, but has no sense of harmony; just such is the case of a natural man, who sees the truth without perceiving its spiritual excellence, and on whose ear the sound of the Gospel falls without awakening music in his soul. Saving knowledge is not a knowledge of the dead letter or outward form of the Gospel, but a knowledge of the truth in 'the light, and lustre, and glory of it;' 'gustful knowledge'³ which has in it a *relish* of the truth as excellent: 'O *taste* and see that the Lord is good.' It is 'the light of the knowledge of the *glory* of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Just conceive of the different views of Christ which were entertained by those with whom he mingled in Judea, and this will help you to understand the difference, or at least to see that there is one, betwixt the one kind of knowledge and the other. All the Jews who saw Christ had some views concerning him: but to the carnal eye 'he had no form nor comeliness; and when they saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him;' while to the spiritual eye, he was 'fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely;' for, says the apostle, 'He dwelt amongst us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' And just as it was then, so is it now: as Christ, the sum and substance of the Gospel, came as the light, 'and the darkness comprehended it not;' as 'he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world *knew him not*;' so the Gospel, which is Christ revealed, may be read and heard. Yet 'seeing we may not perceive, and hearing we may not understand,' until the Spirit 'take of the things of Christ and show them unto us,' by 'shining into our hearts.'

Another difference betwixt the two kinds of knowledge consists in this, that true spiritual light carries with it a *self-evidencing power*, and is accompanied with a heartfelt conviction of its certainty, a cordial belief of its truth. When the eye is opened to see the glory of the Gospel, the mind has an intuitive perception of its divine authority; it 'commends itself to the conscience in the sight of God,' and the sinner feels that 'God is in it of a truth.' God has 'magnified his Word above all his name;' it bears upon it a more striking impress of his divine perfections than any other manifestation by which he has ever made himself known; and when the eye is opened to perceive God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ, the mind can no more believe that the Word could be written, than that the world could be framed, by any other than the omniscient One.

³ Thomas Halyburton.

But the great discriminating test of the difference betwixt the natural and spiritual knowledge of divine truth is to be found in its practical influence and actual fruits. Spiritual light is accompanied with love; it is vital and powerful, transforming, renewing, purifying the soul in which it dwells; for if we behold the glory of God, we are thereby changed into the same image; we love what we discern to be good, we admire what we perceive to be excellent, we imitate and become conformed to what we love and admire. It is not a cold light like that of the moon or stars, but a lively light, accompanied with heat and warmth, vivifying, fructifying; it attunes all the faculties of the soul for the service of God, like the light that fell on the statue of Memnon, and awoke the chords of his sleeping lyre.

The difference betwixt the natural and spiritual knowledge of divine truth is not only real but great. It is as the difference betwixt darkness and light, or betwixt night and day. Every natural man, however educated, is 'alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him.' He may be more learned in the letter of the Scriptures, more thoroughly furnished with all literary erudition, more scientific in his dogmatic orthodoxy, more eloquent in illustration and argument, than many of those who are 'taught of God;' but 'I say unto you, He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' It is not a difference in *degree*, but in kind. In that which is common to both, the natural man may have a higher degree of learning than the spiritual; but in that which is peculiar to such as are taught of God, there is no room for comparison; that kind of knowledge, although it, too, admits of degrees as it is possessed by the people of God, belongs to none else, to none but such as are taught by his Spirit. And this difference is great, insomuch that the people of God, whose eyes are opened to understand the Scriptures, are said to have 'a new understanding given to them.' 'The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true;' not that another faculty is created, but that the old one is thoroughly renewed. And this change is wrought on the understanding itself. It is not enough that the affections be disengaged from sin, so as to remove obstructions to the right operation of a mind supposed to be in itself 'pure, noble, and untainted;' no, the understanding has shared in the ruins of the fall, and is itself perverted; and as such it must be renewed by him who created it, otherwise it will for ever distort the light, however clearly it may shine from the page of Scripture.

As the understanding is the leading faculty of the soul, and plainly designed to influence, control, and govern every other by its light, so darkness here is the prolific cause of much moral and spiritual evil. The understanding, therefore, must be enlightened, if the heart is to be renewed. Spiritual darkness is spoken of in Scripture, not as a mere passive or negative thing, but as a *positive power*, 'the power of darkness' is expressly mentioned, and the apostate angels are represented as kept in 'chains of darkness,' as if it imposed fetters on the soul, and truly none can break those fetters, but he who caused the iron chain to fall from off the hands and feet of his imprisoned disciple.

Our apostasy from God is described as consisting chiefly in our spiritual darkness. The very end of our being was, that we should 'glorify God,' as intelligent creatures might

and ought, by perceiving, adoring, and delighting in his glory: this is the highest exercise of angels and seraphim. And if now a dark cloud conceals from us his perfections, if we can have God present to our thoughts without perceiving his glory, this is at once the evidence and essence of our melancholy fall.

This darkness is not only the deadly shade under which our enmity to God finds a shelter and covering, but it is in some sense the cause of that enmity, inasmuch as it gives rise to innumerable prejudices against God, which feed it and keep it alive, and also to multiform delusions, varying from the barest atheism up to the most awful forms of superstition; and if these prejudices and these delusions are to be swept away, and if the enmity which they beget and nourish is to be slain, it must be by him who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shining into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This illumination of the Spirit has reference to all Gospel truth, but is given in greater or less degrees, while in every instance it embraces whatever is necessary to be known and believed in order to salvation. 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.' '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 him.' From these words it is plain, that every one who is taught of God knows whatever is necessary to be believed in order to salvation, and that he is not left absolutely to depend on mere human teaching; but it is equally clear from the context, that this anointing does not supersede the use of such helps and such means of information as God has graciously provided for his Church; on the contrary, the same apostle says, 'I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning; I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father;' 'I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it.' The apostle's letter was designed and fitted for their instruction, and was useful, not only in 'stirring up their pure minds by way of remembrance,' but also in helping them to apply the truth to the exigencies of their condition, as one that exposed them to the seductions of false teachers, and in enabling them to grow in the knowledge of God; for among Christians there are degrees of spiritual light, as among natural men there are degrees of secular knowledge; and the one kind of knowledge admits of growth and increase, and depends on the use of ordinary means, not less than the other. We may know the Lord, like Apollos; yet we may be brought, like him, to 'know the way of the Lord more perfectly.' As the knowledge which is common to all who are taught of God embraces whatever is necessary to be known and believed in order to salvation, while, being imparted in greater or less degrees, there may be a diversity of opinion even amongst true Christians on points of minor importance, we see at once the origin and the nature of that wonderful uniformity of sentiment amongst them which marks the unity of Christian faith in regard to all the fundamental truths of God's Word, while we may reasonably expect to find a variety of opinions, arising from different degrees of light, even amongst such as are in the main and substantially at one. And this consideration ought to be improved as a lesson of universal charity and of mutual forbearance among the disciples of Christ.

It is a precious Bible truth, that the enlightening grace of the Holy Spirit, although it be specially promised to the Gospel ministry as that by which alone their peculiar functions can be successfully exercised, is not confined to them, nor to any one class or order of men, but it is common to all believers. Every private person, — every humble man, who takes his Bible in his hand, and retires to his closet to read and meditate on it there, is privileged to ask and to expect the teaching of the Spirit of God. 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.' The direct communication of every soul with God as 'the Father of lights,' with Christ as 'the light of the world,' and with the Holy Ghost as 'the Spirit of truth,' shows what standing the Christian people have in the Christian Church; and that, although God has graciously provided for them ministerial helps and spiritual guides, he has not left them absolutely dependent on any order of men; still less has he subjected them to mere human authority in matters of faith: 'their faith must stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.'

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [Reformed Perspectives Magazine Forum](#).

Subscribe to Reformed Perspectives Magazine

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [Reformed Perspectives Magazine](#), please select this [link](#).