

# 'The Inner Illumination We Need'

by A.W. Tozer

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*The sermon emphasizes the need for inner illumination, which is a supernatural endowment and opening of sealed eyes, and an opening of deaf ears, and a waking up of hearts that have previously had no feeling in them.*

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:9

**Topics:** "Spiritual Illumination", "Wisdom and Understanding"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the necessity of inner illumination for Christians, urging believers to seek a deeper understanding of God's will beyond mere intellectual knowledge. He highlights Paul's prayer for the Colossians, which calls for spiritual wisdom and understanding to lead a fruitful life. Tozer warns against self-seeking, selfish possessions, and worldly attachments that hinder spiritual growth and illumination. He stresses that true illumination leads to a life that is pleasing to God and fruitful in good works. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a return to the gifts of the Spirit, particularly the gift of discernment, to navigate the complexities of faith and life.

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## Transcript

"The Inner Illumination We Need"

August 26, 1956

In the book of Colossians, the first chapter, chapter one of Paul's Epistle to the Christians at Colossae. He tells them that he's writing to them and giving thanks for them because he had heard about their faith and Christian love and the hope which they held which had come unto them. And then he said, he had heard about it from his dear fellow servant Epaphras who is evidently either one of them or a teacher or preacher or a pastor working among them who also declared unto Paul, the love of the Colossians in the Spirit.

Now, instead of that calling for a celebration and a lot of back patting, he called for prayer on the part of the man that all of these Colossians might still be better Christians than they were. In verses nine and ten he says, for this cause, we also since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you. And to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will, that is Christ's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Now, this is Paul's prayer, not all of it, but there's too much for us to go through this morning. This is Paul's prayer for the Colossian brethren. He began by complimenting them and assuring them that he believed in them. And in spite of their confused lives, and in spite of the fact that they are on the brink of false doctrine which the book of Colossians was written to save them from. He knew that their final problem was a spiritual one and their final needs spiritual, so his prayer preceded his reproof. And he prayed that they might be filled with all the knowledge of His will. And this will of God, the knowledge of which he prays they might have, might be summarized like this. It has to do with what God reveals about Himself and about ourselves and about our relation to Him through His Son; and the past and the future, and our responsibility to God, because of who He is and because of our relation to him, and because of the place we hold in the world, our responsibility.

Now, that is all found in the Word of God. But here is the peculiar thing. You can read the Word of God and not find it. That's the strange thing, that you can read the Word of God and memorize it by the yard, and yet come up as dry as you went down and know as little about God and the Son of God and what He is and who He is, and our relation to Him and our responsibility toward Him and toward fellow Christians and our fellow men. I say, you can be a Bible student and still not know very much about these things. You can't and daren't leave the Bible to hunt any light because this is the book. And glory gilds the sacred page and this is it.

But this knowledge is more than an intellectual grasp of doctrine. It is a lofty spiritual thing, and it transcends our mere intellect. Now, this is what we're missing today and what I try to point out here and there, that wisdom and spiritual understanding are more than a mere mental grasp of the doctrine. There's a sharp cleavage between the world's values and those of Christ. The world is committed to natural reason. And it is the cheap pride and glory of mankind. No man can be prouder of anything than a man who is intellectually proud, proud of how sharp he is, how high his IQ is and how much he knows. And that, I say, is the chief of man's pride and glory. He wears it as a crown upon his head.

But here is an odd thing too, that the Bible has a low opinion of human reason. God gave us our brains, and he's not angry when we use them. He gave us our intellects, and they have a definite part in our lives. But, the Bible's view of man's ability to find his way around out of his own intelligence, is a very low and a dim one. The word brain doesn't occur, and the word intellect doesn't occur, and the word mentality or mental doesn't occur, I think, in our King James. And certainly, the word genius does not. You know, they talk about religious geniuses, that a man they say, well, Wesley was a religious genius. And they use that word genius. Nobody can quite define the word. But it just means a fellow who is a little bit smarter than the average smart man. And there's nothing like that in the Scriptures at all. It is simply not in the Bible. Reason is scarcely ever found in the Scriptures. And when it is, it's usually, I mean a reference to reason, it's usually not used in a good way.

From the time that God looked down on ways of man and saw that the thoughts of his heart and all his imaginations were evil continually down to Paul in the first Corinthian epistle when he took all proud, egotistical reasoners apart and showed that only the Holy Ghost could teach a man real truth. All through the Scriptures, human reason, a particularly unsaved and untouched unsanctified human reason, doesn't have a good place in the Scriptures. But you say, does not the Bible have a lot to say about the mind? Yes, it has a lot to say about the mind, but it seldom if ever means the brain, or the intellect. It means that the will, the feeling, the desire and the bent. And when it says the carnal mind is enmity against God, it doesn't mean the carnal brain, though that might be true. That doesn't mean the carnal intellect, though that also might be true. It means the carnal bent, the drift or the direction of your life.

You read Paul's epistles and you'll always find the word "mind", I say always. Let me modify that. Possibly, he may even use it once or twice in another way that I can't at the moment recall, but I don't know where it is. Every time he talks about the minding of the flesh and the mind of the flesh, he always means the bent, the pull, the direction of the flesh, and not the intellect at all.

Now, Jesus Christ, our Lord, makes no attempt at compromising with human beings. And His position is the right one. And there is no room in anybody's heart for Christ and man's own reason. It has to yield to Jesus Christ and be sanctified and cleansed and come under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, and every thought be brought down and subjected to the will of God, or else it's contrary to the mind and will of Christ. And the Christian was told this truth, that the most precious knowledge is the knowledge of His will, and the highest wisdom is spiritual wisdom, and the soundest understanding is always spiritual understanding.

Now, the quality of this wisdom for which the man of God prayed that they might have, the quality of this wisdom, isn't a wisdom or a knowledge that would get him a fur coat or a Cadillac on a quiz program. It isn't that kind of intellect at all. It isn't the kind even that would get him in who's who in America. It is another kind of wisdom, something different. It is wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is a supernatural endowment and opening of sealed eyes, and an opening of deaf ears, and a waking up of hearts that have previously had no feeling in them. It's an anointing of inner vision and awakening of spiritual instincts and arousing of the powers that lie in the soul. It's putting up the antenna so as to catch the waves that come from God. It is all that, and it is more. And it embraces the whole moral life. Would you say then Mr. Tozer, how do you harmonize this with the oft-repeated word that the Bible is the sole source book for life and conduct and creed and belief and practice? They are perfectly harmonized my brother, because the illumination of the Holy Spirit never gives you anything that isn't in the Scriptures or according to the Scriptures. The illumination of the Spirit of God that I'm talking about here, that anointing of the inner vision, helps you to understand the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, and gives you light on the Scriptures. And it's that glory that gilds the sacred page which is brighter than the sun.

So, there's never any contrariety and never is there any contradiction. The Spirit of God never told anybody to do anything contrary to the Word of God. He only enables a man spiritually to understand the Word of God. That is all. And it embraces the whole moral life. It's not intellect merely. It is a moral thing. It's a spiritual thing. And we Christians ought to know that the church fathers knew it. The Quakers knew it. The Friends of God knew it in the Middle Ages. And the Methodist knew it and the Salvation Army knew it and the Moravians knew it. And it's only been lately that it has died in fundamental circles that the knowledge and wisdom of God, the spiritual understanding, is a spiritual thing that is not of the mind only, but it is profounder than that. Haven't you seen this happen, Brethren? Haven't you seen two people converted about, say, the same time, maybe the same night they came to know God. They were converted, truly converted. And you would have to say they were converted, the evidence was there, and obviously they were. They went on and were baptized and they got into the church. And one of them moved along very slowly and blunderingly, and the other one suddenly was imbued with a baptism of liquid light. And the inner light was immediately illuminated. And information, they took it up as rapidly as a young animal drinks its milk. And they seemed to make progress so fast, or rapidly, that they were a delight to the whole church. Their zeal and enthusiasm as well as their warmth and their spiritual aspirations were talked about among all the congregation. One young man maybe, another young man who got converted at the same time, moved, if he moved at all, very slowly along and seemed to be unable quite to make, see the line of demarcation between the world and the kingdom of God. The other

man bounced over, way out over, on the side of God and separated from the things of the world so completely.

Why my brethren, I was just talking the other day to a friend in the church here who reminded me of a couple of boys who were converted in this church not too long ago, maybe not more than two years ago. And when they met God, it was such a wonderfully illuminating thing. And their eyes were open so wonderfully that they went straight home and smashed all of their boogie records and burned every bridge they knew about and everything that would draw them back or drag them down. They got rid of it. They threw it off. Nobody told them to do that. Nobody got them aside and instructed them. They didn't hear it from this platform. They had an illumination.

And I have met them like that, and once in a while, one will come bouncing into the kingdom of God alive and illuminated. And it's wonderful how they grow in grace from that time right straight along, but the average person doesn't. They simply don't. And when they have a feeling of some sort and urge in their heart they want to know God better, they take a course in something or other. They say, well, I'll take a course in Bible introduction. And after I've had Bible introduction, I'll surely know more about it. Yes, you will know more about Bible introduction. And I'm sure you shouldn't take a course in Bible introduction. I think you should read constantly. I believe we should. I believe we should read the theologians, that we should read those who've written doctrine for us. I recommend such books as what the Bible teaches by Torrey. I recommend those books; they're great books. And if you have the intellect for it, I recommend the systematic theologians.

But the point is, you can have all that and not know what I'm talking about. The point is that you can know the doctrine and yet not have illumination. For there is a wisdom and a knowledge which is of God. That you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that you might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing being fruitful in every good work and so on.

Now, that's the quality of that wisdom. And remember, notice what it leads to. It isn't that we might become superior saints and wear a halo. It is that we might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, and that we should be fruitful in every good work. For remember, there is no such thing in the Bible known as spirituality detached from morality. Remember that. There is no such thing known in the Scripture as divine illumination detached from divine obedience. Remember that. And remember that every light God gives and every flash of illumination that God gives to the human spirit, He gives it in order that it might eventuate in a worthy walk, a pleasing life and a fruitful work.

God is extremely practical. Go out in nature and gaze around about you and see how very practical and downright God is. God made the heavens and we can look away at the stars that shine at night and feel a poetic lift in our spirits. And we can listen to music and roam through the interstellar spaces in our imagination and imagine that is spirituality. No, my brother, that's not spirituality, that's just imagination. Anybody could do that, anybody. An atheist can do that. The illumination of the Spirit is given that we might know the Truth in order that through the Truth we might walk a worthy life and have a worthy walk and lead a pleasing life and a life fruitful in all good works.

Now to secure this, to secure this illumination of God. I don't know whether, maybe I'd better stay by my script, as they say in the Democratic Convention. But somebody is going to have to come back and say to the world again, or to the church again in the world that we're going to have to have the gifts of the Spirit back in the church once more. Over the last fifty years, the gifts of the Spirit have been glorified by one

small segment of the church, Pentecostal people and trampled upon and trampled underfoot by a larger segment, we fundamentalists.

Now it's time my brethren, that we evangelicals wake up to the fact there isn't one line anywhere and the Word of God, not one line, not one word, not one word that teaches that the gifts of the Spirit were for one period in the church or not for the rest of the church. The church of Christ should have the gifts of the Spirit present right down through to this moment. And I believe that one of those gifts is the gift of discernment, the gift of illumination, the gift of the prophetic gift, the gift of seeing, the gift of moral seeing and spiritual insight that our fathers had in such measure and we have in such small measure. I do not believe that the gifts of the Spirit were ever given as rattles for the unsanctified children of God to play with. I do not believe they were ever given as proofs of anything. I believe they were given as weapons, as tools, as glasses to scan the horizon with, as hammers to pound in the nails with. They were given, the Holy Spirit gave them to His church that we might be a spiritual people and a wise people.

And I don't mind telling you that that gift which I'm praying that the church might have, is that same gift of prophecy. By prophecy I do not mean prediction. I do not have any reason in the world for anybody to want to predict anything for me. Anything that ought to be predicted is in the Bible itself. And I can go and study prophecy and find out anything I want to know about God's tomorrows. And I don't want to know anything about my own life. Therefore, I'm not going to any so-called prophet or prophetess or necromancer or clairvoyant person and say, what will be happening to me two years from now? I don't want to know. I am in the hands of God. One step is enough for me. I do not ask to see the distant scene, only to be in the hands of God, that is enough. And therefore, I do not have anything but an attitude of repugnance toward those who would come about giving prophecies, and come up and say I saw a vision Mr. Tozer that the Lord told me about you. I will rebuke that. I will not listen to it, because I'm in the hands of God and my telephone between me and Gods up. And anytime God wants me to know anything, he can talk to me direct and I don't need any body, neither virgin nor angel, nor anybody living today to come and say, now God told me this about you. God and I are friends, we've been friends since the day I learned to love His son. And God can tell me anything He wants to tell me. And therefore I don't need any prophets. And I don't think that kind of prophecy is necessary.

But there is another kind of spirit of prophecy. It is the spirit of insight, of understanding of inward illumination, of "inly" intuition that enables us to know and see and understand and appraise and know where we are. And see where we are and what latitude and longitude and what times we're living in, and be able to smell out the things that are false and scent out the things that are right and follow them. And that gift of prophecy ought to be on the church of Christ. And the gift of discernment so that we'll know what's wrong.

I've been preaching now for quite a number of years, quite a number of years. Everybody's telling me I ought not talk about how old I am. One man says, even worried about me and praying about it. A District Superintendent says he's bothered. But I know how old I am. My mother told me when I was born. And so I know that I've been preaching around quite a while and the number of things that I have seen come up and like a comet, get the attention of the Christian public for a while and bring the wheels of spiritual progress to a halt while we all stood gape-mouthed and watch some great fellow perform. And then he passes into forgotten limbo and then we have to crank the thing up and get started again.

Where are the men of discernment? Where are the prophets in the church? Where are the wise saints who know what is of God and what isn't? Where are they? But you say, what are you talking about? Oh,

well, just in case I'm too general, let me be specific. I remember it wasn't so very long ago that the British Israelism came along with its, we were, who was it? England was Joseph I think and his two sons, we were divided and all that sort of stuff. Well, I didn't have to read their literature. All I had to do was to exercise a sense of spiritual smell which the Holy Ghost gave me and I knew they were wrong, but it didn't know why. So, I went downtown and bought a basket full of their literature and read through it. And then I knew why they were wrong Scripturally. I had known they were wrong before. And I've lived through little boy preachers and little girl preachers. And those little girl preachers are now middle aged women with children. And those little boy preachers are now having to get a bigger belt every year to take care of the expansion. And those wonders and prodigies that were, have gone and cease to be. Samuel began when he was a little boy, but he kept right on. Nobody said much about him and as he grew up right down until he was an old tottering man with a beard four feet long. He still went on with God. But a lot of these modern boy and girl wonders, what happened to them and where are they? You don't even know their address.

Not very long ago, one of them came to me. She'd been a girl wonder when she was a little girl. She knew just how to talk to everybody's heart. And then, she grew up, she married with two or three children. And I was at a certain convention preaching and lo and behold, she hunted me up. What a disappointment. What an emptiness. What a dissatisfaction. What failure. What blindness. And yet, she had been a prodigy in her day. And I remember years ago, a little boy, just a nice little boy. I like him. You know I love children, and they're lovely little fellas if we put them where they belong. You know, in the kindergarten and let them play with rubber toys, but to bring them to the pulpit. And I remember years ago that one of them was celebrated as being the boy, who had as a little chap, two or three or four years old, won a swimming prize and had been decorated by then President Woodrow Wilson.

Well, I've walked with God and I've fellowshipped with prophets. And in the Scriptures and in great books and in prayer, I've known a little of the mighty and the great. And like Elijah, I can say, I am Elijah that stands before God. And so, how would you hope ever to get me interested in anybody whose only claim to fame was, that he'd been decorated by a president of the United States. Oh, my brother, how mortal the presidents are, and how human the presidents are, and how small the great men are. And how vulnerable kings are and how mortal queens are.

And when the child of God has walked with his heavenly Father long enough, he gets used to Royal company. And anything less than that is small to him. But anyway, the church runs after that kind of thing. In the pyramids of Egypt, do you remember the pyramids of Egypt, when everybody was preaching about a pyramid? Men whose names nobody could pronounce that built pyramids in Egypt, and in it was embodied all the prophecies and telling the time of the Lord's return. I knew that was wrong of course. And what I knew twenty-five years ago by a spiritual sense of smell, everybody else found out later by reading up a little that it was wrong.

My brethren, to keep our values right, to keep aimed in the right direction, to not run after a rabbit when God sends you out to chase a deer. Do you hunters know that when you're training a dog to hunt deer, and one of the great difficulties is to keep them from running after rabbits. In fact, they have the great game and they use dogs to find them. And when they're first training them, their big problem is to keep them from running after a woodchuck or a striped squirrel or something else. And God's people need to have illumination and light and a salty, inward sense of seeing in order that they might not run sideways and all down all the little alleys, but go straightaway in the direction that God has sent them.

In the few minutes I have remaining I want to point out to you what it is that keeps us in the dark and prevents us from having this sense of sight. This illumination, which gives eyesight to the blind. Brethren, honesty compels us to say that there isn't very much of it these days. Honesty compels us to admit it. Among Christians you find so very little of it. What is it that keeps the inner shrines so dimly lighted? What is it that keeps our spiritual IQ so low? What is it that keeps our spiritual feelings so dull? Well, I'll give you three things that's wrong with us. Self-seeking is one. That deadly "I," that deadly "I." Self-seeking, the man who's seeking anything for himself can never have eyesight poured on his blind eyes. The man's very self-seeking drives God from him. And his very desire for honor and praise and recognition blinds him to the Higher Light and prevents him from ever knowing the will of God with spiritual understanding. And the cure is, to renounce self and dedicate our hearts to the honor of God, and dedicate ourselves to the honor of God.

If there's any one thing more than another that I have to do, it is to go to God day after day and week after week, times without number, and keep rededicating my whole life to the high honor of God and ruling out any possibility of self-seeking. For as soon as we're seekers after self, we renounce the Light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. We renounce that inward illumination of the Holy Ghost and will make it impossible for God to engift us and prepare us for high and eternal service.

And the second thing that causes our inner lives to be dark is selfish possessions. That deadly "mine." It belongs to me we say. And the cure is a complete renunciation of all ownership. If you have a sense of possessing anything, and there's any controversy anywhere in your heart that God can't have it, you'll never have the illumination. The Spirit of God can never answer this prayer. There can never come to you a knowledge of His will and all spiritual understanding unto all good works and pleasing life. For You have ruined your inner life by desiring to possess something.

Every one of us should be cut off from possessing anything. You say, how about my little baby, that darling little baby of mine. Well, God has honored you by giving you a little baby to rear, to educate, to care for and to love. But He's never given that to you to say, this is mine, and God can't have it. And don't forget that the moment you ever raise a hand and say no to God about your baby, the baby's a curse and not a blessing. You say, what about my new wife. She's everything from Sarah on down to Suzanna Wesley and more, and she's wonderful. I don't doubt that son. I don't doubt that at all. You wouldn't have married any other kind. But just as soon as she becomes yours and there's any feeling that God can't have her if he wants her, she's a hindrance to you. I've got to be delivered from everything in every body, completely delivered. You'll be criticized for that.

A dear man of God who has a wife and a lovely family and such harmonious living in such fellowship I have scarcely known said to me one time, he said, Brother Tozer, I'll tell you, he said, God is blessing me, God's blessing me. He said, I'm moving along with God in a wonderful way. He said, now, I wouldn't want my wife to know this, but he said, you know, I've even put her on the altar where God is closer to me than she is. And I'm not holding on to her. God can have her. Well, it's been about four years ago he's been living with here and ever since and are raising a happy family. But I don't know whether wives like to hear that or not, or husbands like to hear it, but don't be jealous of God young fellow. There is one closer to you than your wife. There is one closer to you madam than your husband. There is one closer to you than your baby or your happy growing child. And if you don't keep it that way, darkness of mind and dullness and intellect will result.

And you well know that both Paul in 1 Corinthians and the writer to the Hebrews in five and six of Hebrews wrote mournfully and lamented the suspended growth among certain Christians. Why? Self-seeking, self-possession, and unlawful attachment to this world. Christ's condition of discipleship is, that we renounce everything in this world, even down to our very lives also, and take our cross and follow Him. And if we do not do it, we'll be where the Christians were in Corinth and where the Hebrew Christians were. Not dead, but certainly not very alive. Not on their way to hell, but certainly not happily on their way to heaven. But in the strange twilight zone of spiritual uncertainty. Up one day and down the next day. Preaching sermons and reading books to justify their upness and their downness, up and down, up and down. I hear it. Even I hear it on the air. Preachers want to harmonize the Bible with their spiritual experience, and their spiritual experience has been up one day and down the next so they harmonize the Scriptures with it. And drag the high level of the Word of God down to their low level or carnality and blindness.

My brethren, it should not be so. If we're attached to the world in any measure, you're attached to money. How about your bank account? It's getting big, isn't it under the Republicans. You want to vote for Ike because you have a big bank account. If we vote for Ike because we have a big bank account, we're unworthy to be Americans, or if we vote for anybody else for that reason, we're unworthy to be called Americans. If you're attached to your bank account, God can't take you on. We must lay aside all weights and everything that hinders us and all that holds us down, and strip like a racer and run like a track man with nothing on, but the bare necessity in order that we might free, be free to race down the road.

Well, these are thine enemies, children of God: self-seeking, self-admiration, self-esteem, self-possession and unlawful attachment to the world. These are thine enemies. The old man of God prayed for the Christians and for us that we might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. When we block every effort of God to answer that prayer by the way we live, these are thine enemies, O Christian.

Now we can admit the truth of this and do something about it, or we can tolerate ourselves and go on as we are. Or we can seek comfort instead of help. The Lord deliver us from seeking comfort. Go to the average man's Bible or women's Bible and you'll find all the comforting verses underscored. It's not good friends. God wrote the book to comfort you provided you were in a position where comfort wouldn't hurt you. But he also wrote the Book to correct you and rebuke you and chastise you and discipline you if you're going in the wrong direction. So, let the Word of God have its disciplinary work in your life. Let it hurt you. This idea abroad today that the church is a place where we all sit down and commune with our ancestors and rest and relax and avoid a nervous breakdown. It hasn't any place in the Scriptures at all. You go to church to find out what's wrong with you and how you can do something about it. And then, of course, to worship God too. We worship God, but we're here to hear what's wrong with us.

This morning, I've pointed out our ideal, an illuminated mind and an illuminated heart. Why don't we have it? Because, self-possession, self-love, self-admiration, self-possession, detachment to the world, all of these things prevent us. And I'm boldly asking you, take today and do something about it. You don't have to come to an altar here. Take today and do something about it. Don't go home and flip on the TV and waste the afternoon. Go before God somewhere. If you have to go to your own bedroom, go somewhere and with open Bible, seek from God deliverance from these things that bring scales on your mind and prevent you from enjoying the inward illumination. Will you do it? If you won't do it, you've wasted your time this morning. But if you'll do it, you may look back whether you're one of our own friends here, or whether you are strangers from afar. You may look back on this morning as the time in your life when you

took a step toward the right and decided to do something about this miserable, retarded growth, this slow growth or no growth at all that's kept you so many years stunted and frosted and held back. God wants you to be illuminated and filled and enlightened in order that you might live right and be fruitful. And may God grant it to be so.

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