

# The Necessity of Divine Teaching

by Charles Finney

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*The sermon emphasizes the necessity of divine teaching through the Holy Spirit for true understanding and sanctification in the Christian faith.*

**Scripture:** John 16:7

**Topics:** "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Divine Teaching"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical need for divine teaching in understanding and applying the gospel, arguing that human reason alone is insufficient for spiritual enlightenment and sanctification. He explains that while individuals can grasp the historical and doctrinal aspects of Christianity, true understanding and transformation come only through the Holy Spirit's illumination. Finney outlines the reasons for the lack of divine influence in people's lives, including failure to ask for it, reliance on human wisdom, and the grieving of the Holy Spirit. He stresses that everyone is responsible for the light they could have received and that the church must seek divine guidance to truly comprehend and live out the gospel.

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## Transcript

TEXT.--Nevertheless I tell you the truth--it is expedient for you that I go away--for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you--but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me--of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more--of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth--for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.--John xvi. 7-13.

THE doctrine of the necessity of Divine Influence, to enlighten and sanctify the minds of men, is very abundantly taught in the Bible, and is generally maintained, as a matter of opinion at least, in all orthodox churches. But, as a matter of fact, there seems to be very little available knowledge of the gospel among mankind; so little that it exerts comparatively little influence. The great ends of the gospel have hardly begun to be realised, in the production of holiness on the earth. It is a grand question, whether we do need Divine Influence to attain the ends of the gospel; and if we do need it, then in what degree do we need it, and why? If our minds are unsettled on this question, we shall be unsettled on all the subjects that practically concern our sanctification.

In discoursing on this subject to-night, I design to pursue the following order:

I. Inquire how far the reason of man, unaided by Divine Illumination, is capable of understanding the things of religion.

II. Show wherein the reason of man is defective, in regard to the capacity of gaining any available knowledge of the gospel.

III. That the Spirit of God alone can supply the Illumination that is needed.

IV. That every one may have the influence of the Spirit, according to his necessities.

V. The reasons why any individual fails to receive this divine aid to the extent of his necessities.

VI. That men are responsible for the light which they might have, as well as for that which they actually enjoy.

I. I shall inquire how far the reason of man, unaided by Divine illumination, is capable of apprehending the things of religion.

1. The mind of man is capable of understanding the historical facts of religion; just as it comprehends any other historical facts.

2. It is capable of understanding the doctrinal propositions of the gospel.

That is, it can understand those abstractions which make up the skeleton of the gospel; such as the being and character of God, the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, and other fundamental doctrines which make up the framework of the gospel. That is, it can understand them as propositions, and see the evidence that supports them as true, just as it can any other propositions in science. For instance, to enter a little into detail:

A man by his reason may understand the law of God. He can understand that it requires him to exercise perfect love, towards God and all other beings. He can see the ground of his obligation to do this, because he is a moral being. He knows by experience what love is, for he has exercised love towards different objects. And he can, therefore, form or comprehend the idea of love, so far as to see the reasonableness of the requirement. He can understand the foundation and the force of moral obligation, and see, in some measure, the extent of his obligation to love God.

So, likewise, he can see that he is a sinner, and that he cannot be saved by his own works. He has broken the law, so that the law can never justify him. He can see that if he is ever saved, he must be justified through mere mercy, by an act of pardon.

I might go through the whole circle of theology, and show that the human understanding is capable of knowing it, in the abstract, as a system of propositions, to be received and believed, on evidence, like any other science. I do not mean to be understood, as saying that unaided reason can attain any available knowledge of the things of religion, or any such knowledge as will be effectual to produce a sanctifying change.

II. I am to show wherein our knowledge of the things of religion is necessarily defective, without the aids of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, I am to show what our knowledge of the gospel lacks, to make it available to salvation.

And here it is needful to distinguish between knowledge which might be available, to one that was himself disposed to love and obey God; and what will be available, in fact, to a sinner, who is wholly indisposed to holiness. It is easy to see, that one who is disposed to do right would be influenced to duty by a far less amount of illumination, or a far less clear and vivid view of motives, than one who is disposed to do wrong. What we are now inquiring after respects the matter of fact, in this world. Whether the knowledge attainable by our present faculties would be available to influence us to do right, were there no sin in the world, is more than I can say. As a matter of fact, the knowledge which Adam had when in a state of innocency did not avail to influence him to do right. But we are now speaking of things as they are in this world, and to show what is the reason that men, as sinners, can have no available knowledge of divine things; no such knowledge as will, as a matter of fact, influence them to love and serve God.

Knowledge, to avail any thing towards effecting its object, must be such as will influence the mind. The will must be controlled. And to do this, the mind must have such a view of things as to excite emotion, corresponding to the object in view. Mere intellect never will move the soul to act. A pure scientific abstraction of the intellect, that does not touch the feelings, or excite any emotion, is wholly unavailable to move the will. It is so every where. It would be so in heaven. You must bring the mind under a degree of excitement, to influence the will in any case. And in the case of sinners, to influence sinners to love and obey God, you must have a great degree of light, such as will powerfully excite the mind, and produce strong emotions. The reasons for obedience must be made to appear with great strength and vividness, so as to subdue their rebellious hearts, and bring them voluntarily to obey God. This is available knowledge. This men never have, and never can have, without the Spirit of God. If men were disposed to do right, I know not how far their knowledge, attainable by unaided reason might avail. But, as they are universally and totally indisposed, this knowledge will never do it. I will mention some of the reasons:

1. All the knowledge we can have here of spiritual things, is by analogy, or comparison.

Our minds are here shut up in the body, and derive all our ideas from external objects, through the senses. Now, we never can of ourselves obtain knowledge of spiritual or eternal things in this way sufficient to rightly influence our wills. Our bodily powers were not created for this. All the ideas we can have of the spiritual world is by analogy, or comparing them with the things around us. It is easily seen that all ideas conveyed to our minds in this way, must be extremely imperfect, and that we do not, after all, get the true idea in our minds. The Jewish types were probably the most forcible means which God could then use, for giving to the Jews a correct idea of the gospel. Considering how the eastern nations were accustomed, by their education, to the use of figures, and parables, and types, probably the system of types was the most impressive and happy mode that could be devised to gain a more ready access for the truth to their minds, and give them a more full idea of the plan of redemption than could be communicated in any other way. And yet it is manifest that the ideas which were communicated in this way were extremely imperfect; and that, without divine illumination to make them see the reality more fully than they could by unaided reason, they never would have got any available knowledge in this way.

So words are merely signs of ideas. They are not the ideas, but the representatives of ideas. It is often very difficult, and sometimes impossible to convey ideas by words. Take a little child, and attempt to talk with him, and how difficult it is, on many subjects, to get your ideas into his little mind. He must have some experience of the things you are trying to teach, before you can convey ideas to him by words.

Suppose this congregation were all blind, and had never seen colors. Then suppose that on that wall hung a most grand and beautiful painting, and that I was a perfect master of the subject, and should undertake to describe it to you. No language that I could use would give you such an idea of the painting, as to enable you to form a picture of it in your minds.--Where, on any subject, we are obliged, from the nature of the case, to use figurative language, analogies, and resemblances, the knowledge we communicate is necessarily defective and inadequate. Who of you have not heard descriptions of persons and places, till you thought you had an accurate knowledge of them; but when you come to see them you find you had no true idea of the reality?

Suppose an individual were to visit this world, from another planet, where all things are constituted on the most opposite principles from those which are adopted here. Suppose him to remain here long enough to learn our language, and that then he should undertake to give us a description of the world he had left. We should understand it according to our ideas and experience. Now, if the analogy between the two worlds is very imperfect, it is plain that our knowledge of things there, from his description, must be imperfect in proportion. So, when we find in the Bible descriptions of heaven and hell, or anything in the invisible world, it is plain that from mere words we can get no true ideas at all adequate to the reality.

2. The wickedness of our hearts is so great, as to pervert our judgment, and shut out from our minds much that we might understand of the things of religion.

When a man's mind is so perverted on any subject, that he will not take up the evidence concerning it, he cannot, of course, come at the knowledge of the truth on that subject. This is our case in regard to religion. Perverseness of heart so shuts out the light, that the intellect does not, and from the nature of things cannot, get even the ideas it might otherwise gain, respecting divine things.

3. Prejudice is a great obstacle to the reception of correct knowledge concerning religion.

Take the case of the disciples of Christ. They had strong Jewish prejudices respecting the plan of salvation--so strong that all the instructions of Christ himself could not make them understand the truth. After teaching them personally, for three years, with all the talent, and simplicity, and skill he was master of, he could never get their minds in possession of the first principles of the gospel. Up to his very death, he could not make them see that he should die, and rise from the dead. Therefore he says in his last conversation--"If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." This was the very design of his going away from them, that the Spirit of Truth might come, and put them in possession of the things which he meant by the words he had used in teaching them.

The general truth is this; that without divine illumination, men can understand from the Bible enough to convict and condemn them, but not enough to sanctify and save them.

Some may ask, What, then, is the use of revelation?

It is of much use. The Bible is as plain as it can be. Who doubts that our Lord Jesus Christ gave instructions to his disciples, as plainly as he could? See the pains which he took to illustrate his teaching; how simple his language; how he brings it down to the weakest comprehension, as a parent would to a little child. And yet it remains true, that without divine illumination, the unaided reason of man never did, and never will attain any available knowledge of the gospel. The difficulty lies in the subject. The Bible contains the gospel, as plain as it can be made. That is, it contains the signs of the ideas, as far as language can represent the things of religion. No language but figurative language can be used for this

purpose. And this will for ever be inadequate to put our minds in real possession of the things themselves. The difficulty is in our ignorance and sin, and in the nature of the subject. This is the reason why we need divine illumination, to get any available knowledge of the gospel.

III. The Spirit of God alone can give us this illumination.

The Bible says, "No man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Now the abstract proposition of the Deity of Christ, can be proved, as a matter of science, so as to gain the assent of any unbiased mind to the truth, that Jesus is Lord. But nothing short of the Holy Ghost can so put the mind in possession of the idea of Christ, as God, as to fix the soul in the belief of the fact, and make it available to sanctify the heart.

Again, it is said that "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Here it is evident that the drawing spoken of, is teaching by the Holy Spirit. They must be taught of God, and learn of the Father, before they can ever have such a knowledge of the things of religion as actually to come to Christ.

Christ says, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." The word Paracletos, here translated Comforter, properly means a Helper or Teacher. "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."

So in the fourteenth chapter, the Savior says, "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; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." And again, in the 26th verse, "But 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." Here you see the office of the Spirit of God is, to instruct mankind in regard to the things of religion.

Now, it is manifest that none but the Spirit of God can supply this defect, from a single consideration--That all teaching by words, whether by Jesus Christ, or by apostles, or by any inspired or uninspired teacher, coming merely through the senses, can never put the mind in possession of the idea of spiritual things. The kind of teaching that we need is this; we want some one to teach us the things of religion, who is not obliged to depend on words, or to reach our minds through the medium of the senses. We want some way in which the ideas themselves can be brought to our minds, and not merely the signs of the ideas. We want a teacher who can directly approach the mind itself, and not through the senses; and who can exhibit the ideas of religion, without being obliged to use words. This the Spirit of God can do.

The manner in which the Spirit of God does this, is what we can never know in this world. But the fact is undeniable, that he can reach the mind without the use of words, and can put our minds in possession of the ideas themselves, of which the types, or figures, or words, of the human teacher, are only the signs or imperfect representatives. The human teacher can only use words to our senses, and finds it impossible to possess us of the ideas of that which we have never experienced. But the Spirit of God, having direct

access to the mind, can, through the outward sign, possess us of the actual idea of things. What Christian does not know this, as a matter of fact? What Christian does not know, from his own experience, that the Spirit of God does lead him instantly to see that in a passage of scripture, which all his study, and effort of mind to know the meaning of could never have given him in the world?

Take the case again, of a painting on the wall there, and suppose that all the congregation were blind, and I was trying to describe to them this painting. Now suppose, while I was laboring to make them understand the various distinctions and combinations of colors, and they are bending their minds to understand it, all at once their eyes are opened! You can then see for yourselves the very things which I was vainly trying to bring to your minds by words. Now, the office of the Spirit of God, and what he alone can do, is to open the spiritual eye, and bring the things which we try to describe by analogy and signs, in all their living reality, before the mind, so as to put the mind in complete possession of the thing as it is.

It is evident, too, that no one but the Spirit of God, so knows the things of God as to be able to give us the idea of those things correctly. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man that is in him?" What can a beast know of the things of a man, of a man's character, designs, &c.? I can speak to your consciousness--being a man, and knowing the things of a man. But I cannot speak these things to the consciousness of a beast, neither can a beast speak of these things, because he has not the spirit of a man in him, and cannot know them. In like manner, the Bible says, "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." The Spirit of God, knowing from consciousness the things of God, possesses a different kind of knowledge of these things from what other beings can possess; and therefore, can give us the kind of instruction that we need, and such as no other being can give.

IV. The needed influences of the Spirit of God may be possessed by all men, freely, and under the gospel.

A few passages from the Bible will show this:

Jesus Christ says God is more willing to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, than parents are to give their children bread. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "Therefore, I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN HIM." If it be true, that God has made these unlimited promises, that ALL MEN, who will ask of him, may have divine illumination as much as they will ask for, then it is true that all men may have as much of divine illumination as they need.

V. I will show the reasons why any do not have as much divine illumination as they need.

1. They do not ask for it in any such manner or degree as they need it.
2. They ask amiss, or from selfish motives.

The apostle James says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your lusts." When an individual has a selfish motive for asking, or some other reason, than a desire to glorify God, he need not expect to receive divine illumination. If his object in asking for the Holy Ghost, is that he may always be happy in religion, or that he may be very wise in the scriptures, or be looked upon as an eminent Christian, or have his experience spoken of as remarkable, or any other selfish view, that is a good reason why he should not receive even what he asks.

3. They do not use the proper means to attain what they ask.

Suppose a person neglects his Bible, and yet asks God to give him a knowledge of the things of religion. That is tempting God. The manner in which God gives knowledge is through the Bible, and preaching, and the other appointed means of instruction. If a person will not use these means, when they are in his power, how ever much he may pray, he need not expect divine instruction. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

There is an important difference to be observed, between the cases of those who possess these means, and those who do not. I suppose that a person may learn the gospel, and receive all the illumination he needs, under any circumstances of privation of means. As if he was on a desolate island, he might receive direct illumination from the Spirit of God. And so he might, in any other circumstances, where he absolutely could not have access to any means of instruction. Some very remarkable cases of this kind have occurred within a few years. I have known one case, which I looked upon at the time as miraculous, and for that reason have seldom mentioned it, feeling that even the church were not prepared to receive it. When I was an evangelist, I labored once in a revival, in a neighborhood where there were many Germans. They had received but little instruction, and many of them could not read. But when the gospel was preached among them, the Spirit of God was poured out, and a most powerful revival followed. In the midst of the harvest, if a meeting was appointed at any place, the whole neighborhood would come together, and fill the house, and hang upon the preacher's lips, while he tried to possess their minds with the truths of the gospel. One poor German woman naturally intelligent, but who could not read, in relating her experience in one of these meetings, told this fact which was certified to by her neighbors. With many tears and a heart full of joy, she said, "When I loved God, I longed to read the Bible, and I prayed to Jesus Christ, I said and felt, O Jesus! thou canst teach me to read thy holy bible, and the Lord taught me to read. There was a Bible in the house, and when I had prayed, I thought I could read the Bible, and I got the book, and opened it, and the words were just what I had heard people read. I said, O Lord Jesus Christ, thou canst teach me to read," and I believed he could, and I thought I did read, but I went and asked the school-madam if I read, and she said I read it right, and the Lord has taught me to read my Bible, blessed be his name for it." I do not know but the school-madam to whom she referred was in the house and heard her relation. At all events, she was a woman of good character among her neighbors, and some of the most respectable of them afterwards told me, they did not doubt the truth of what she said. I have no doubt it was true.

At the time, I thought it was a miracle; but since the facts which have been developed within a few years, respecting the indestructibleness of the memory, I have thought this case might be explained in that way; and that she had probably been told the names of letters and their powers when young, and now the Spirit of God, in answer to her prayer, had quickened her mind, and brought it all to her remembrance, so that she could read the Bible.

Some of you will recollect the facts which were stated here, one evening, by President Mahan, which show that every impression which is made on the mind of man, remains there forever indelible. One case that he mentioned was that of an old lady, who when she was young, had read some lines of poetry, relating a little story; and afterwards, when old, she wished to tell the story to some children, to whom she thought it would be useful, and to her surprise the whole of the lines came up fresh in her memory, and she repeated them verbatim, although she had never committed them to memory at all, but only read them when she was young. Another was the case of an ignorant servant girl. She had once lived with a learned minister, who was accustomed to read aloud the Hebrew Bible, in his study, which was in hearing of the place

where this girl did her work. Of course she understood nothing of the words, but only heard the sounds. Long afterwards when she was on her death-bed, she astonished the bystanders by reciting whole chapters of Hebrew and Chaldaic. The neighbors at first thought it was a miracle, but at length learned the explanation. It is plain from this, that even unintelligible sound may be so impressed on the memory, as afterwards to recur with entire distinctness. I suppose that was probably the case with this poor German woman, and that the Spirit of God, in answer to her fervent prayer, so refreshed her memory as to recall the sounds and forms of letters, she had been told when a child, and thus enable her at once to read the Bible.

I say, therefore, that while those who do not possess any outward means of instruction may obtain directly from the Spirit of God whatever degree or kind of illumination they need in the things of religion; those who possess or can obtain the outward means, and do not use them, tempt God, when they pray for divine illumination and neglect the use of means for obtaining knowledge. To those who have the opportunity, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." If any man keeps away from the means within his reach, he can expect illumination in no other way. Whereas, if he is shut out from the use of means, as God is true to his promises, we must believe that he can be illuminated without means, to any extent that he needs.

4. Another reason why many do not receive that illumination from the Spirit of God which they need is because they grieve the Spirit, in many ways.

They live in such a manner, as to grieve, or offend the Holy Spirit, so that he cannot consistently grant them his illuminating grace.

5. Another reason is, that they depend on instructions and means, as available without divine influence.

How many rely on the instructions they receive from ministers, or commentaries, or books, or their own powers of inquiry; not feeling that all these things, without the Spirit of God, will only kill, but can never make alive--can only damn, but never save. It seems as though the whole church was in error on this point; depending on means for divine knowledge, without feeling that NO MEANS are available, without the Spirit of God. O, if the church felt this--if they really felt that all the means in creation are unavailing without the teaching of the Holy Ghost, how they would pray, and cleanse their hands, and humble their hearts, until the Comforter would descend to teach them all things that they need to know of religion.

6. Self-confidence is another reason why so little is experienced of divine illumination.

So long as professing Christians place confidence in learning, or criticism, or their natural ingenuity, to learn the things of religion, rely on it, they are not likely to enjoy much of the illumination of the Spirit of God.

VI. I am to show that men are responsible for what they might have of divine illumination.

This is a universal truth, and is acknowledged by all mankind, that a man is just as responsible for what light he might have, as for that he actually has. The common law, which is the voice of common reason, adopts it as a maxim that no man who breaks the law is to be excused for ignorance of the law, because all are held bound to know what the law is. So it is with your children, in a case where they might know your will, you consider them so much the more blame-worthy, if they offend. So it is in religion: where men have both the outward means of instruction, and the inward teachings of the Holy Spirit, absolutely within

their reach, if they sin in ignorance, they are not only without excuse on that score, but their ignorance is itself a crime, and is an aggravation of their guilt. And all men are plainly without excuse for not possessing all the knowledge which would be available for their perfect and immediate sanctification.

#### REMARKS.

I. You see what is the effect of all other instructions on a congregation where no divine influence is enjoyed.

It may convince the church of duty, but will never produce sanctification. It may harden the heart, but will never change it. Without divine influence, it is but a savor of death unto death.

II. You see that it is important to use all the appropriate means of religious instruction in our power, as the medium through which the Spirit of God conveys divine illumination to the mind.

There is no reason why we should not use the means in our power, and apply our natural faculties to acquire knowledge of religion, as faithfully as if we could understand the whole subject without divine influence. And if we do not use means, when within our power, we have no reason to expect divine aid. When we help ourselves, God helps us. When we use our natural faculties to understand these things, we may expect God will enlighten us. To turn our eyes away from the light, and then pray that we may be made to see, is to tempt God.

III. They are blind leaders of the blind, who attempt to teach the things of religion without being themselves taught of God.

No degree of learning, or power of discrimination as to the didactics of theology, will ever make a man a successful teacher of religion, unless he enjoys the illuminating powers of the Holy Ghost. He is blind if he supposes he understands the Bible without this, and if he undertakes to teach religion, he deceives himself, and all who depend on him, and both will fall into the ditch together.

IV. If an individual teaches the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, he will be understood.

He may understand the gospel himself, and yet not make his hearers understand it, because the Holy Ghost is not sent on them as well as himself. But if the Spirit of God is on them, precisely in proportion as he himself understands the real meaning of the gospel, he will make his hearers understand it.

V. In preaching the gospel, ministers should never use texts, the meaning of which they have not been taught by the Spirit of the God.

They should not attempt to explain passages of which they are not confident they have been taught the meaning by the Holy Spirit. It is presumption. And they need not do it, for they may always have the teachings of the Spirit, by asking. God is more ready to bestow divine illumination than an earthly parent is to give bread to his child; and if they ask, as a child, when he is hungry, asks his mother for a piece of bread, they may always receive all the light they need. This is applicable both to preachers and to teachers in Sabbath schools and Bible classes. If any of them attempt to teach the scriptures without being themselves taught, they are no more fit to teach without divine teaching, than the most ignorant person in the streets is fit to teach astronomy. I fear both minister and teachers generally, have understood very little of their need of this divine teaching, and have felt very little of the necessity of praying over their sermons and bible lessons, till they felt confident that the Spirit of God has possessed

their minds with the true idea of the word of God. If this was done as it ought to be, their instructions would be far more effectual than we now see them.

Do you, who are teachers of Bible and Sabbath school classes in this church, believe this? Are you in the habit, conscientiously and uniformly, of seeking the true idea of every lesson on your knees? Or do you go to some commentary and then come and peddle out your dry stuff to your classes, that you get out of the commentaries and books, without any of the Holy Ghost in your teaching? If you do this, let me tell you, that you had better be doing something else. What would you say of a minister, if you knew he never prayed over his texts? You might as well have Balaam's ass for a minister, and even the dumb beast in such a case might speak with man's voice and rebuke the madness of such a man. He could give just as much available instruction to reach the deep fountains of the heart, as such a preacher. Well, now, this is just as important for a Sunday school teacher as for a minister. If you do not pray over your lesson, until you feel that God has taught you the idea contained in it, BEWARE! How dare you go and teach that for religion, which you do not honestly suppose you have been taught of God?

VI. It is a vast error in theological students, when they study to get the views of all the great teachers, the tomes of the fathers and doctors, and every body's opinion as to what the Bible means, but the opinion of the Holy Ghost.

With hearts as cold as marble, instead of going right to the source of light, they go and gather up the husks of learning, and peddle it out among the churches as religious instruction. Horrible! While they do thus, we never shall have an efficient ministry. It is right they should get all the help they can from learning, to understand the word of God. But they ought never to rest in any thing they get from book learning, until they are satisfied that God has put them in possession of the very idea which HE would have them receive.

I have tried hard to make this impression, and I believe I have succeeded in some degree, on the theological students under my care. And if I had done it more, I have no doubt I might have succeeded better. And I can say, that when I studied theology, I spent many hours on my knees, and perhaps I might say weeks, often with the Bible before me, laboring and praying to come at the very mind of the Spirit. I do not say this boastingly, but as a matter of fact, to show that the sentiment here advanced is no novel opinion with me. And I have always got my texts and sermons on my knees. And yet I am conscious that I have gained very little knowledge in religion, compared with what I might have had, if I had taken right hold of the source of light, as I ought to have done.

VII. How little knowledge have the great body of the church, respecting the word of God !

Put them, for instance, to read the epistles, and other parts, and probably they will not have knowledge enough to give an opinion as to the real meaning of one-tenth of the Bible. No wonder the church is not sanctified! They need MORE TRUTH. Our Savior says, "Sanctify them through thy truth." This grand means of sanctification must be more richly enjoyed before the church will know what entire sanctification means. The church do not understand the Bible. And the reason is, THEY HAVE NOT GONE TO THE AUTHOR to explain it. Although they have this blessed privilege every day, and just as often as they choose, of carrying the book right to the Author for his explanation; yet how little, how very little, do the church know of the Bible, which they are conscious they have been taught to know by the Holy Ghost! Read the text again, read other similar passages, and then say if Christians are not exceedingly to blame for not understanding the Bible.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-necessity-of-divine-teaching/>

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