

The Necessity of the Divine Light

by John Newton

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual understanding, which can only be achieved through faith in God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 11:25, Romans 8:7, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Spiritual Discernment", "Divine Intervention"

Description

John Newton addresses a friend's expectations of a direct response to a letter, expressing his commitment to answer the proposed questions as soon as possible. He emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment through the influence of the Spirit of God, highlighting the need for a personal experience to fully understand spiritual truths. Newton discusses the innate enmity of the human heart against God's character as revealed in Scripture, pointing out the necessity of divine intervention for true faith and salvation. Despite potential disagreements, Newton encourages open dialogue and mutual respect in their discussions.

Transcript

October 28, 1775

My Dear Friend,

It never entered my pericranium, that you expected I should fully and directly answer your letter while I was in London; and yet you reasonably might, as you knew nothing of my engagements: but, indeed, it was impracticable; I could only send you a hasty line, as a token that I remembered you. I informed you, when I returned, that I was just going out again. Since I came home the second time, I have been engrossed by things that would admit of no delay; and, at length, not having so much as a note from you, I thought I would wait till I heard farther. But from first to last it was my intention, and I think my promise, to answer in the manner you proposed, as soon as I could. And even now I must beg a little longer time. Believe me, that as the wise and good providence of God brought us together, without any expectation of mine, I will do all in my power to preserve the connexion, and particularly by giving my thoughts on such questions as you propose. And though, to consider your questions in the manner you wish, and to point out the agreement of detached texts (as they occur) with my views, seems in prospect to require a volume rather than a sheet, yet I am not discouraged; only I beg you to make allowances for other things, and to be assured, that before I had the pleasure of corresponding with you, I had very little spare time. Expect, then, the best satisfaction I am able to give you, as soon as possible. To prepare the way, I will try hard for

a little leisure, to give you a few thoughts upon yours, which came last night.

You complain that I have hitherto disappointed your expectations. If you have preserved my first papers, I believe you will find, that I apprised you this might probably be the event, and certainly must, unless it should please God to make what I should write a means of giving you the same views with myself. I only proposed, as a witness, to bear a simple testimony to what I have seen and known. So far as you believed me sincere, and unwilling to impose upon you, I thought you might admit, there was perhaps some weight in what I had advanced, though for the present you could not see things in the same light. And if you allowed a possibility, that my changing the sentiments which I once held in common with yourself, might be upon sufficient grounds, you would, as I trust you do, wait upon the Great Teacher for His instruction; otherwise I did not expect to convince you, nor do I yet; only I am glad to put myself in His hands as an instrument.

You quite misunderstood what I spoke of the light and influence of the Spirit of God. He reveals to me no new truths, but has only shown me the meaning of His own written Word; nor is this light a particular revelation, it is common to all who are born again. And thus, though you and I cannot fully agree about it, yet I almost daily meet with persons from the east, west, north, and south, who, though I never saw them before, I find understand me at once. This (as you bid me be explicit) is the one thing which I think you at present lack. And I limited my expression to one thing, because it is our Lord's expression, and because that one thing includes many. As I said before, I cannot give it you; but the Lord can; and from the desire He has raised in your heart, I have a warm hope that He will. You place the whole stress of your inquiries upon reason; I am far from discarding reason, when it is enlightened and sanctified; but spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, and can be received and discerned no other way; for to our natural reason they are foolishness, I Cor. ii. 14, 15; Matt. xi. 25. This certain something I can no more describe to those who have not experienced it, than I could describe the taste of a pine-apple to a person who had never seen one. But Scriptural proofs might be adduced in abundance, yet not so as to give a solid conviction of it, till we actually experience it. Thus it was with my friend whose case I sent you. When God gave him the key, (as he expressed it,) then the Scriptures were unlocked. His wishing himself a Deist, some time before, was not from any libertine exceptions he made to the precepts of the Gospel, but from the perplexing embarrassments he had found, by endeavouring to understand the doctrines by dint of reason, though reason in him was as strong and penetrating as in most men I ever met with. Upon your present plan, how can I hope to satisfy you, though even St. Paul asserts it, that the carnal mind is enmity against God? You will readily agree with me to the proposition as it stands in St. Paul's words, but I think will not so readily assent to what I have no more doubt than of my own existence, is the sense of it: that the heart of man, of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow-creatures, however abundant and zealous in his devotions, is by nature enmity against God: not, indeed, against the idea he himself forms of God, but against the character which God has revealed of Himself in the Scripture. Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God, and to the one method of salvation He has appointed in the Gospel by faith only, by such a faith, as it is no more in his power to contribute to the production of in himself, than he can contribute to raising the dead, or making a world. Whatever is of the flesh is flesh, and can rise no higher than its principle; but the Lord could convince you of this by a glance of thought.

But I must break off, for want both of room and time. Let me remind you of our agreement, to use and to allow the greatest freedom, and not to be offended with what is meant well on either side. Something in your last letter made me apprehensive you were a little displeased with me. He that knows my heart,

knows that I wish you well as my own soul.

The expression, of atoning for disobedience by repentance, was in one of your sermons. I considered it as unguarded; but, on my view of things, it were in a manner impossible I could use that expression, though perhaps too often unguarded myself.

I am, &c.

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