

On Intellectual and Spiritual Light

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual light, which renews and purifies the heart, and distinguishes it from intellectual light, which is confined to the head.

Scripture: Psalm 119:130, Proverbs 4:18, Matthew 5:16, John 8:12, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Ephesians 5:8, James 2:26, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Spiritual Enlightenment", "Heart Religion"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the distinction between mere intellectual light and the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing that spiritual light renews and purifies the heart, while intellectual light is confined to the head. He highlights the importance of being called by sovereign grace into a marvelous light that reveals the hidden evils of the heart and fills one with shame and self-aborrence. Reade urges believers to examine their real state before God, emphasizing the need for heart religion over mere head knowledge, as true humility and genuine love for the Savior are essential for spiritual enlightenment.

Transcript

32. ON INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL LIGHT

The whole world lies in wickedness, in a state of spiritual darkness. Out of this darkness, sinners are called by the Gospel; and when, through grace, they arise and depart out of this valley of the shadow of death, they are admitted into the marvelous light of the everlasting covenant, and become the children of light and of the day. Thus they who once were not a people, become the people of God; and they are called beloved, who were once not beloved. Those who were afar off are made near by the blood of Christ; and those who were strangers and foreigners, are made fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Thus grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Hence a most important and vital distinction must be made between mere intellectual light and the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit; a distinction which, like a powerful scythe, will cut down many a fair herb, many a beautiful flower, in the garden of nature. Natural light, improved by human instruction and study, is confined altogether to the head. Spiritual light, derived from above, enlightens the understanding, while it renews and purifies the heart.

History furnishes us with many instances of men endowed with all the riches of science, whose hearts were full of enmity against God; though some happy exceptions have, through grace, blessed and benefited the world. Intellectual light may soften the character, and improve the morals; but experience testifies that nothing but the power of the Holy Spirit can newly create the soul. God works by his word. Hence the Scriptural exhortation to sinners is, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light;" and when divine power accompanies the command, the dead soul arises to spiritual life and action.

To believers, the command is, "Arise, shine; for your light has come; the glory of the Lord has risen upon you:" and then new vigor and energy is felt in these seasons of refreshing, when Jesus arises on his people with healing in his wings. Spiritual light, thus descending from "the Sun of righteousness," is received through the medium of the Holy Scriptures, read with prayer: and through the instrumentality of the Gospel, faithfully preached, and heard in a spirit of faith.

But through whatever channel it is received, it is always communicated by the Holy Spirit, and is known by its sanctifying effects on the mind, conscience, and heart. All who do not possess this spiritual light are in a state of darkness, however bright and luminous their intellectual light may be. How frequently do we find men of science and deep research completely blinded, with respect to the divine science of living to God! And, what is still more painful, how often do we meet with people, in this day of Gospel light, who have very clear views of the truth; who are able to speak, not only fluently upon the mysteries of grace, but even to delight and edify those who hear them: and yet, who are themselves destitute of true humility, genuine love to the Savior, and that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace.

Thus, however illuminated their understandings may be, they are, in the eye of a heart-searching God, in a state of spiritual blindness. Surely, then, the above distinction is most important. How many bright professors does it involve in darkness! how many shining candles does it put out! "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "Though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing."

"The world, by wisdom, knows not God." "Oh! that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always." "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my father which is in heaven." "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." These, and many other passages which might be adduced, prove the immense difference between head knowledge and heart religion. The former is the pride of the hypocrite; the latter is the portion of the humble penitent.

Oh! my soul, examine well into your real state and condition before God. Do not be satisfied with how much you know, but see what effect the knowledge which you have attained has upon the heart and life! Are you acquainted with your fallen state by nature, and your added wretchedness through actual transgression? If this awful truth has been admitted into your understanding, so far it is well. But rest not here. This is merely intellectual light, if its rays extend no further.

Search and see whether its piercing beams have reached your conscience, and, like forked lightning in the midst of Sinai's thunder, struck you with conviction and dismay. Like Saul of Tarsus, has it struck you to the ground, and laid you low in the dust of deep humiliation? Without this self-abasing experience of the total corruption of your nature, and this heart-humbling sense of your own extreme depravity, all your

knowledge is merely human, "taught by the precept of men," and leaves you in a state of spiritual insensibility; the more dangerous, because the more liable to make you contented with the barren knowledge of your condition, and to substitute the shadow for the substance.

With respect to all the other great and glorious doctrines of grace, the same important questions must be put to the heart; for faith, without works, is dead. The Christians, to whom Peter wrote, were called "out of darkness into marvelous light." Have I been thus called by sovereign grace, by almighty love, into a light which may be denominated "marvelous?" The mere reception of divine truth into the mind does not deserve this appellation. But, when the light of truth discovers to myself the hidden evils of my heart; when it shows me the deformity of sin, the vileness of my nature, and thus fills me with shame and self-abhorrence, it is, indeed, a "marvelous light."

When the light of truth reveals to my soul the blessed Jesus in the essential dignity of his person; the suitableness of his glorious offices in the covenant of redemption; the greatness, freeness, and extent of his love in becoming man, and expiring on the cross, that he might save rebellious sinners; and, when this view of a loving Savior fills my soul with love, admiration, delight, and joy, it may well be called a "marvelous light." When the light of truth takes away the false glare of the world, and shows me its real worth; that all is vanity and vexation of spirit; when every thing is placed in its true light, and seen through a clear medium; and when this view sobers my expectations, and weans my affections from the world: then it is truly a "marvelous light."

When the light of truth unveils the world of spirits, and opens to my wondering sight the unutterable glories of eternity; when I behold the blissful seats, the happy mansions, and the peaceful abodes of the redeemed; when I contemplate the fulness of their joy in being forever with their Lord, and like their Lord; and when this prospect, of the saints felicity makes holiness more lovely, and my breathings for the Spirit of grace more ardent; when it makes me long and labor after an admittance, through faith in Jesus, into those bright abodes: then it is a "marvelous light" Oh, glorious Sun of righteousness, Oh, light of the world! shine into my heart, that I may be light in the Lord; and walk as a child of light, shining, by reflection, to your praise and glory.

Oh! preserve me from resting in outward forms, or barren speculations. Let nothing satisfy my soul but the possession of yourself, dwelling in my heart by faith, and filling me with peace and joy, blended with holy fear. Oh! grant that I may ever prefer you to everything in earth or heaven; for you, blessed Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three persons in one Jehovah, are alone worthy of all love, adoration, and praise. Everlasting praises shall be given unto you by men and angels.

Oh my soul, begin now the eternal anthem. However feeble the string, yet let it vibrate to the praise of your God. However weak your notes, yet let them ascend, in grateful adorations, to Him who has loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood. To Him be all honor, glory, and power, ascribed by every tongue, henceforth and forever. Amen and Amen." Oh you, from whom all blessings spring, Accept the offering which I bring: A grateful tribute--heartfelt praise, For all the riches of your grace.

Shall I enjoy your bounty, Lord, And not your boundless love record? Oh! let me tell to all around What joys in Jesus' name abound. Jesus! your saving name contains Eternal glories--endless gains; The sinner, pardoned by your grace, Is made your chosen dwelling-place. Bless the Lord, my soul, and sing Unceasing praises to your King, Whose love through all his counsels shine, Transcendent, matchless, and divine.

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