

A Divine and Supernatural Light Part 1

Jonathan Edwards

02 January 2023

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Divine and supernatural light immediately imparted to the soul by the spirit of God, shown to be both scriptural and rational doctrine. A sermon by Jonathan Edwards, part one, preached at Northampton and published at the desire of some of the hearers in the year 1734. Matthew 1617 and Jesus answered and said unto him, blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. Christ says these words to Peter upon occasion of his professing his faith in him as the Son of God our Lord was inquiring of his disciples, who men said he was not that he needed to be informed, but only to introduce and give occasion to what follows. They answer that some said he was John the Baptist, and some Elias, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, when they had thus given an account.

Who others said he was, Christ asked them who they said he was. Simon Peter, whom we find always zealous and forward, was the first to answer. He readily replied to the question, thou art Christ, the son of the living God. Upon this occasion Christ says, as he does to him, and of him in the text in which we may observe, one, that Peter is pronounced blessed on this account. Blessed art thou.

Thou art a happy man, that thou art not ignorant of this, that I am Christ, the son of the living God. Thou art distinguishingly happy. Others are blinded, and have dark and deluded apprehensions, as you have now given an account, some thinking that I am

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Elias, and some that I am Jeremiah, and some one thing, and some another, but none of them thinking right, all of them misled. Happy art thou that art so distinguished as to know the truth in this matter. Two.

The evidence of this his happiness declared, viz. That God and he only had revealed it to him. This is an evidence of his being blessed first, as it shows how peculiarly favored he was of God above others. Q. D.

How highly favored art thou that others that are wise and great men, the scribes, pharisees, and rulers, and the nation in general, are left in darkness to follow their own misguided apprehensions and that thou shouldst be singled out, as it were by name, that my heavenly father should thus set his love on thee. Simon Barjona. This argues thee blessed, that thou shouldst thus be the object of God's distinguishing love. Secondly, it evidences his blessedness also, as it intimates that this knowledge is above any that flesh and blood can reveal. This is such knowledge as only my father, which is in heaven, can give.

It is too high and excellent to be communicated by such means as other knowledge is. Thou art blessed that thou knowest that which God alone can teach thee. The original of this knowledge is here declared both negatively and positively, positively, as God is here declared the author of it negatively, as it is declared that flesh and blood had not revealed it. God is the author of all knowledge and understanding whatsoever. He is the author of the knowledge that is obtained by human learning.

He is the author of all moral prudence, and of the knowledge and skill that men have in their secular business. Thus it is said of all in Israel that were wise hearted and skilled in embroidering, that God had filled them with the spirit of wisdom. Exodus 28 three God is the author of such knowledge, but yet not so but that flesh and blood reveals it. Mortal men are capable of imparting the knowledge of human arts and sciences, and skill in temporal affairs. God is the author of such knowledge by those means.

Flesh and blood is employed as the immediate or second cause of it he conveys it by the power and influence of natural means. But this spiritual knowledge, spoken of in

the text, is what God is the author of, and none else he reveals it, and flesh and blood reveals it not. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge. What had passed in the preceding discourse naturally occasioned Christ to observe this, because the disciples had been telling how others did not know him, but were generally mistaken about him, and divided and confounded in their opinions of him. But Peter had declared his assured faith that he was the son of God.

Now it was natural to observe how it was not flesh and blood that had revealed it to him, but God. For if this knowledge were dependent on natural causes or means, how came it to pass that they, a company of poor fishermen, illiterate men, and persons of low education, attained to the knowledge of the truth, while the scribes and pharisees, men of vastly higher advantages, and greater knowledge and sagacity in other matters, remained in ignorance? This could be owing only to the gracious distinguishing influence and revelation of the spirit of God. Hence what I would make the subject of my present discourse from these words is this doctrine, that there is such a thing as a spiritual and divine light, immediately imparted to the soul by God of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means. And on this subject I would, one, show what this divine light is two, how it is given immediately by God, and not obtained by natural means.

Three, show the truth of the doctrine, and then conclude with a brief improvement. One, I would show what this spiritual and divine light is, and in order to it would show first in a few things what it is not. And here one, those convictions that natural men may have of their sin and misery is not this spiritual and divine light. Men in a natural condition may have convictions of the guilt that lies upon them, and of the anger of God, and their danger of divine vengeance. Such convictions are from light, or sensibleness of truth.

That some sinners have a greater conviction of their guilt and misery than others is because some have more light or more of an apprehension of truth than others and this light and conviction may be from the spirit of God. The spirit convinces men of sin, but yet nature is much more concerned in it than in the communication of that

spiritual and divine light that is spoken of in the doctrine. It is from the spirit of God only as assisting natural principles, and not as infusing any new principles. Common grace differs from special in that it influences only by assisting of nature, and not by imparting grace, or bestowing anything above nature. The light that is obtained is wholly natural, or of no superior kind to what mere nature attains to, though more of that kind be obtained than would be obtained if men were left holy to themselves.

Or, in other words, common grace only assists the faculties of the soul to do that more fully, which they do by nature, as natural conscience or reason, will by mere nature make a man sensible of guilt, and will accuse and condemn him when he has gone amiss. Conscience is a principle natural to men, and the work that it doth naturally or of itself, is to give an apprehension of right and wrong, and to suggest to the mind the relation that there is between right and wrong, and a retribution. The spirit of God, in those convictions which unregenerate men sometimes have, assists conscience to do this work in a further degree than it would do if they were left to themselves. He helps it against those things that tend to stupefy it, and obstruct its exercise. But in the renewing and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, those things are wrought in the soul that are above nature, and of which there is nothing of the like kind in the soul by nature and they have caused to exist in the soul habitually and according to such a stated constitution or law, that lays such a foundation for exercises in a continued course, as is called a principle of nature.

Not only are remaining principles assisted to do their work more freely and fully but those principles are restored that were utterly destroyed by the fall and the mind henceforward habitually exerts those acts that the dominion of sin had made it as holy, destitute of as a dead body, is of vital acts. The spirit of God acts in a very different manner in the one case from what he doth in the other. He may indeed act upon the mind of a natural man, but he acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling vital principle he acts upon the mind of an unregenerate person, as an extrinsic occasional agent for in acting upon them, he doth not unite himself to them for notwithstanding all his influences, that they may be the subjects of they are still sensual, having not the spirit, Jude 19 but he unites himself with the mind of a saint,

takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new supernatural principle of life and action. There is the difference, that the spirit of God, in acting in the soul of a godly man, exerts and communicates himself there in his own proper nature. Holiness is the proper nature of the spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit operates in the minds of the godly, by uniting himself to them, and living in them, and exerting his own nature in the exercise of their faculties. The Spirit of God may act upon a creature, and yet not in acting, communicate himself. The Spirit of God may act upon inanimate creatures, as the spirit moved upon the face of the waters in the beginning of the creation, so the Spirit of God may act upon the minds of men many ways, and communicate himself no more than when he acts upon an inanimate creature, for instance, he may excite thoughts in them, may assist their natural reason and understanding, or may assist other natural principles and this without any union with the soul, but may act as it were, as upon an external object. But as he acts in his holy influences and spiritual operations, he acts in a way of peculiar communication of himself, so that the subject is dense, denominated spiritual. Two.

This spiritual and divine light does not consist in any impression made upon the imagination. It is no impression upon the mind, as though one saw anything with the bodily eyes it is no imagination or idea of an outward light, or glory, or any beauty of form, or countenance, or a visible luster of brightness of any object. The imagination may be strongly impressed with such things, but this is not spiritual light. Indeed, when the mind has a lively discovery of spiritual things, and is greatly affected by the power of divine light, it may, and probably very commonly, does much affect the imagination, so that impressions of an outward beauty or brightness may accompany those spiritual discoveries. But spiritual light is not that impression upon the imagination, but an exceeding different thing from it.

Natural men may have lively impressions on their imaginations, and we cannot determine but the devil who transforms himself into an angel of light, may cause imaginations of an outward beauty or visible glory, and of sounds and speeches, and other such things, but these are things of a vastly inferior nature to spiritual light.

Three. This spiritual light is not the suggesting of any new truths or propositions not contained in the word of God. This suggesting of new truths or doctrines to the mind, independent of any antecedent revelation of those propositions, either in word or writing, is inspiration such as the prophets and apostles had, and such as some enthusiasts pretend to. But this spiritual life that I am speaking of is quite a different thing from inspiration.

It reveals no new doctrine it suggests no new proposition to the mind it teaches no new thing of God, or Christ, or another world not taught in the Bible, but only gives a due apprehension of those things that are taught in the word of God. Four. It is not every affecting view that men have of the things of religion, that is, the spiritual and divine light. Men, by mere principles of nature, are capable of being affected with things that have a special relation to religion, as well as other things. A person by mere nature, for instance, may be liable to be affected with the story of Jesus Christ and the sufferings he underwent, as well as by any other tragical story.

He may be the more affected with it from the interest he conceives mankind to have in it. Yea, he may be affected with it without believing it, as well as a man may be affected with what he reads in a romance, or sees acted in a stage play. He may be affected with a lively and eloquent description of many pleasant things that attend the state of the blessed in heaven, as well as his imagination be entertained by a romantic description of the pleasantness of fairyland or the like and that common belief of the truth of the things of religion that persons may have from education or otherwise, may help forward their affection. We read in scripture of many that were greatly affected with things of a religious nature, who yet were there presented as wholly graceless, and many of them very ill men. A person, therefore, may have affecting views of the things of religion, and yet be very destitute of spiritual light.

Flesh and blood may be the author of this. One man may give another an affecting view of divine things with but common assistance. But God alone can give a spiritual discovery of them. But I proceed to show secondly positively, what this spiritual and divine light is, and it may be thus described, a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of

them thence arising. This spiritual light primarily consists in the former of these viz a real sense and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the word of God.

A spiritual and saving conviction of the truth and reality of these things arises from such a sight of their divine excellency and glory, so that this conviction of their truth is in effect and natural consequence of this sight of their divine glory. There is, therefore in this spiritual light one a true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion, a real sense of the excellency of God and Jesus Christ, and of the work of redemption and the ways and works of God revealed in the Gospel. There is a divine and superlative glory in these things, an excellency that is of a vastly higher kind and more sublime nature than in other things, a glory greatly distinguishing them from all that is earthly and temporal. He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart.

There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness. There is not only a speculatively judging that God is gracious, but a sense of how amiable God is upon that account, or a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute. There is a twofold understanding or knowledge of good that God has made the mind of man capable of the first, that which is merely speculative and notional, as when a person only speculatively judges that anything is which, by the agreement of mankind is called good or excellent, viz. That which is most to general advantage, and between which and a reward there is a suitableness and the like and the other is that which consists in the sense of the heart, as when there is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing, so that the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it. In the former is exercised merely the speculative faculty, or the understanding strictly so called, or is spoken of indistinction from the will or disposition of the soul in the latter the will or inclination or heart are mainly concerned.

Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a

difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes, but a man cannot have the latter, unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful and having a sense of his beauty. The former may be obtained by hearsay, but the latter only by seeing the countenance.

There is a wide difference between mere speculative rational judging anything to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness and beauty. The former rests only in the head. Speculation only is concerned in it, but the heart is concerned in the latter. When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension. It is implied in a person's being heartily sensible of the loveliness of a thing, that the idea of it is sweet and pleasant to his soul, which is a far different thing from having a rational opinion that it is excellent.

Two, there arises from this sense of divine excellency of things contained in the word of God, a conviction of the truth and reality of them and that either directly or indirectly. First, indirectly and that two ways. One, as the prejudices that are in the heart against the truth of divine things are hereby removed, so that the mind becomes susceptible of the due force of rational arguments for their truth. The mind of man is naturally full of prejudices against the truth of divine things. It is full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel, which is a disadvantage to those arguments that prove their truth, and causes them to lose their force upon the mind.

But when a person has discovered to him the divine excellency of christian doctrines, this destroys the enmity, removes those prejudices, and sanctifies the reason, and causes it to lie open to the force of arguments for their truth. Hence was the different effect that Christ's miracles had to convince the disciples from what they had to convince the scribes and Pharisees not that they had a stronger reason, or had their reason more improved, but their reason was sanctified, and those blinding prejudices that the scribes and Pharisees were under were removed by the sense that they had of the excellency of Christ and his doctrine. Two, it not only removes the hindrances of reason, but positively helps reason. It makes even the speculative notions the more

lively it engages the attention of the mind, with the fixedness and intenseness to that kind of objects which causes it to have a clearer view of them, and enables it more clearly to see their mutual relations, and occasions it to take more notice of them. The ideas themselves that otherwise were dim and obscure are by this means impressed with the greater strength, and have a light cast upon them, so that the mind can better judge of them, as he that beholds the objects on the face of the earth, when the light of the sun is cast upon them, so that the mind can better judge of them, as he that holds the objects on the face of the earth, when the light of the sun is cast upon them, is under greater advantage to discern them in their true forms and mutual relations, than he that sees them in a dim starlight or twilight.

The mind, having a sensibleness of the excellency of divine objects, dwells upon them with the light and the powers of the soul are more awakened and enlivened. To employ themselves in the contemplation of them, and exert themselves more fully and much more to the purpose. The beauty and sweetness of the objects draws on the faculties, and draws forth their exercises, so that reason itself is under far greater advantages for its proper and free exercises, and to obtain its proper end, free of darkness and delusion. But secondly, a true sense of the divine excellency of the things of God's word doth more directly and immediately convince of the truth of them and that because the excellency of these things is so superlative, there is a beauty in them that is so divine and godlike, that is greatly and evidently distinguishing of them from things merely human or that men are the inventors and authors of a glory that is so high and great that, when clearly seen, commands ascent to their divinity and reality. When there is an actual and lively discovery of this beauty and excellency, it will not allow of any such thought as that it is a human work, or the fruit of men's invention.

This evidence that they that are spiritually enlightened have of the truth of the things of religion is a kind of intuitive and immediate evidence. They believe the doctrines of God's word to be divine, because they see divinity in them, I. E. They see a divine and transcendent, and most evidently distinguishing glory in them. Such a glory, as if clearly seen, does not leave room to doubt of their being of God, and not of men.

Such a conviction of the truth of religion as this, arising these ways from a sense of the divine excellency of them, is that true spiritual conviction that there is in saving faith. And this original of it is that by which it is most essentially distinguished from that common ascent which unregenerate men are capable of. End of section three. This is a librivox recording. All librivox recordings are in the public domain.

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