

Jonathan Edwards -A Divine and Supernatural Light Part 2

Jonathan Edwards

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The classic series on Shepherd's stream a collection of sermons in the public domain by great theologians assembled here. For your edification, select sermons of Jonathan Edwards. Section four. A 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 two.

I proceed now to the second thing proposed, viz. To show how this light is immediately given by God, and not obtained by natural means. And here one. It is not intended that the natural faculties are not made use of in it. The natural faculties are the subject of this light, and they are the subject in such a manner that they are not merely passive, but active in it.

The acts and exercises of man's understanding are concerned and made use of in it. God, in letting in this light into the soul, deals with man according to his nature, or as a rational creature, and makes use of his human faculties. But yet this light is not the less immediately from God for that though the faculties are made use of, it is as the subject, and not as the cause and that acting of the faculties in it is not the cause, but is either implied in the thing itself, in the light that is imparted, or is the consequence of it, as the use that we make of our eyes in beholding various objects when the sun arises, is not the cause of the light that discovers those objects to us. Two. It is not intended that outward means have no concern in this affair.

As I have observed already. It is not in this affair as it is in inspiration, where new truths are suggested. For here is by this light only given a due apprehension of the

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same truths that are revealed in the word of God and therefore it is not given without the word. The gospel is made use of in this affair. This light is the light of the glorious gospel of Christ.

Two Corinthians four. Four. The gospel is as a glass, by which this light is conveyed to us. One Corinthians 13:12. Now we see through a glass but three, when it is said that this light is given immediately by God, and not obtained by natural means, hereby is intended that it is given by God, without making use of any means that operate by their own power or a natural force.

God makes use of means, but it is not as immediate causes to produce this effect. There are not truly any second causes of it, but it is produced by God immediately. The word of God is no proper cause of this effect it does not operate by any natural force in it. The word of God is only made use of to convey to the mind the subject matter of this saving instruction, and this indeed it doth convey to us by natural force or influence. It conveys to our minds these and those doctrines.

It is the cause of the notion of them in our heads, but not of the sense of the divine excellency of them in our hearts. Indeed, a person cannot have spiritual light without the word, but that does not argue that the word properly causes that light. The mind cannot see the excellency of any doctrine, unless that doctrine be first in the mind. But the seeing of the excellency of the doctrine may be immediately from the spirit of God, though the conveying of the doctrine or proposition itself may be by the word, so that the notions that are the subject matter of this light are conveyed to the mind by the word of God. But that due sense of the heart, wherein this light formally consists, is immediately by the spirit of God, as for instance, that notion that there is a Christ, and that Christ is holy and gracious, is conveyed to the mind by the word of God.

But the sense of the excellency of Christ, by reason of that holiness and grace, is nevertheless immediately the work of the Holy Spirit. I come now three to show the truth of this doctrine, that is, to show that there is such a thing as that spiritual light that has been described thus immediately let into the mind by God. And here I would show briefly that this doctrine is both scriptural and rational. First, it is scriptural. My

text is not only full to the purpose, but it is a doctrine that the scripture abounds in.

We are there abundantly taught that the saints differ from the ungodly in this that they have the knowledge of God, and a sight of God and of Jesus Christ. I shall mention but few texts of many. One, John three six. Whosoever sinneth has not seen him, nor known him. Third, John eleven.

He that doth good is of God, but he that doth evil hath not seen God. John 14:19 the world seeth me no more, but ye see me. John 17:3 and this is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. This knowledge or sight of God and Christ cannot be a mere speculative knowledge, because it is spoken of as a seeing and knowing, wherein they differ from the ungodly and by these scriptures it must not only be a different knowledge in degree and circumstances and different in its effects, but it must be entirely different in nature and kind. And this light and knowledge is always spoken of as immediately given of God.

Matthew 11:25 to 27. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, o Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my father and no man knoweth the Son but the father neither knoweth any man the father, save the son, and he to whomever the Son will reveal him. Here this effect is ascribed alone to the arbitrary operation and gift of God, bestowing this knowledge on whom he will, and distinguishing those with it that have the least natural advantage or means of knowledge, even babes, when it is denied to the wise and prudent, and the imparting of the knowledge of God, is here appropriated to the son of God as his sole prerogative.

And again, two corinthians four six for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This plainly shows that there is such a thing as a discovery of the divine superlative glory and excellency of God in Christ, and that peculiar to the saints and also that it is as immediately from God as light from the sun,

and that it is the immediate effect of his power and will for it is compared to God's creating the light by his powerful word in the beginning of the creation, and is said to be by the spirit of the Lord. In the 18th verse of the preceding chapter, God is spoken of as giving the knowledge of Christ in conversion, as of what before was hidden and unseen in that Galatians 115 and 16. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his son in me, the scripture also speaks plainly of such a knowledge of the word of God, as has been described as the immediate gift of God. Psalm one nine open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

What could the psalmist mean when he begged of God to open his eyes? Was he ever blind? Might he not have resort to the law, and see every word and sentence in it when he pleased? And what could he mean by those wondrous things? Was it the wonderful stories of the creation and deluge, and Israel's passing through the Red Sea and the like?

Were not his eyes open to read these strange things, when he would doubtless, by wondrous things in God's law, he had respect to those distinguishing and wonderful excellencies and marvelous manifestations of the divine perfections and glory, that there was in the commands and doctrines of the word, and those works and counsels of God that were there revealed. So the scripture speaks of a knowledge of God's dispensation and covenant of mercy, and way of grace towards his people, as peculiar to the saints, and given only by God. Psalm 20 514 the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant and that a true and saving belief of the truth of religion is that which arises from such a discovery is also what the scripture teaches, as John 640 and this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life, where it is plain that a true faith is what arises from the spiritual sight of Christ. And John 17 six, seven, and eight I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee for I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee.

And they have believed that thou didst send me where Christ's manifesting God's name to the disciples, or giving them the knowledge of God, was what whereby they knew that Christ's doctrine was of God, and that Christ himself was of him, proceeded from him, and was sent by him again. John 12:44-46 Jesus cried and said, he that believeth on me believeth not on me, but on him that sent me and he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. Their believing in Christ, and spiritually seeing him are spoken of as running parallel. Christ condemns the Jews that they did not know that he was the messiah, and that his doctrine was true from an inward distinguishing taste and relish of what was divine.

In Luke 12:56-57 he having there blamed the Jews, that though they could discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, and signs of the weather, that yet they could not discern those times, or as it was expressed in Matthew, the signs of those times, he adds, yea, and why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right, I. E. Without extrinsic signs? Why have ye not that sense of true excellency, whereby ye may distinguish that which is holy and divine? Why have ye not that savor of the things of God by which you may see the distinguishing glory and evident divinity of me and my doctrine.

The apostle Peter mentions it as what gave them the apostles good and well grounded assurance of the truth of the gospel, that they had seen the divine glory of Christ. Two Peter 1:16. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. The apostle has respect to that visible glory of Christ which they saw in his transfiguration, that glory was so divine, having such an ineffable appearance and semblance of divine holiness, majesty, and grace, that it evidently denoted him to be a divine person. But if a sight of Christ's outward glory might give a rational assurance of his divinity, why may not an apprehension of his spiritual glory do so too?

Doubtless, Christ's spiritual glory is in itself as distinguishing, and as plainly showing his divinity as his outward glory, and a great deal more for his spiritual glory is what wherein his divinity consists and the outward glory of his transfiguration showed him

to be divine only as it was a remarkable image or representation of that spiritual glory. Doubtless, therefore, he that has had a clear sight of the spiritual glory of Christ may say, I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but have been an eyewitness of his majesty upon his good grounds, as the apostle, when he had respect to the outward glory of Christ that he had seen. But this brings me to what was proposed next, viz. To show that, secondly, this doctrine is rational one. It is rational to suppose that there is really such an excellency in divine things that is so transcendent and exceedingly different from what is in other things, that, if it were seen, would most evidently distinguish them.

We cannot rationally doubt but that things that are divine, that appertain to the supreme being, are vastly different from things that are human that there is that godlike, high, and glorious excellency in them, that does most remarkably difference them from the things that are of men, insomuch that if the difference were but seen, it would have a convincing, satisfying influence upon anyone that they are what they are. This divine what reason can be offered against it? Unless we would argue that God is not remarkably distinguished in glory from men? If Christ should now appear to anyone, as he did on the mount at his transfiguration, or if he should appear to the world in the glory that he now appears in, as he will do at the day of judgment, without doubt the glory and majesty that he would appear in would be such as would satisfy everyone that he was a divine person, and that religion was true, and it would be a most reasonable and well grounded conviction too. And why may there not be that stamp of divinity or divine glory on the word of God, on the scheme and doctrine of the gospel that may be in like manner distinguishing, and is rationally convincing, provided it be but seen?

It is rational to suppose that when God speaks to the world, there should be something in his word or speech vastly different from man's word. Supposing that God never had spoken to the world, but we had noticed that he was about to do it, that he was about to reveal himself from heaven, and speak to us immediately himself in divine speeches or discourses, as it were, from his own mouth or that he should give us a book of his own inditing? After what manner should we expect that he would speak? Would it not

be rational to suppose that his speech would be exceeding different from man's speech, that he should speak like a God that is, that there should be such an excellency and sublimity in his speech or word, such a stamp of wisdom, holiness, majesty, and other divine perfections, that the word of man, yea, of the wisest of men, should appear mean and base in comparison of it. Doubtless it would be thought rational to expect this, and unreasonable to think otherwise.

When a wise man speaks in the exercise of his wisdom, there is something in everything he says that is very distinguishable from the talk of a little child. So without doubt, and much more is the speech of God. If there be any such thing as the speech of God, to be distinguished from that of the wisest of men, agreeably to Jeremiah 23 28 29. God having there been reproving the false prophets that prophesied in his name, and pretended that what they spake was his word, when indeed it was their own word, says the prophet, that hath a dream, let him tell a dream. And he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.

What is the chaff to the wheat? Saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Two. If there be such a distinguishing excellency in divine things, it is rational to suppose that there be such a thing as seeing it.

What should hinder but that it may be seen? It is no argument that there is no such thing as such a distinguishing excellency or that if there be, that it cannot be seen that some do not see it, though they may be discerning men in temporal matters. It is not rational to suppose, if there be any such excellency in divine things, that wicked men should see it. It is not rational to suppose that those whose minds are full of spiritual pollution, and under the power of filthy lusts, should have any relish or sense of divine beauty or excellency, or that their minds should be susceptible of that light that is in its own nature so pure and heavenly. It need not seem at all strange that sin should so blind the mind, seeing that men's particular natural tempers and dispositions will so much blind them in secular matters, as when men's natural temper is melancholy, jealous, fearful, proud, or the like.

Three it is rational to suppose that this knowledge should be given immediately by God, and not be obtained by natural means. Upon what account should it seem unreasonable that there should be any immediate communication between God and the creature? It is strange that men should make any matter of difficulty of it. Why should not he that made all things still have something immediately to do with the things that he has made? Where lies the great difficulty, if we own the being of a God, and that he created all things out of nothing, of allowing some immediate influence of God on the creation?

Still, if it be reasonable to suppose it with respect to any part of the creation, it is especially so with respect to reasonable, intelligent creatures, who are next to God in the gradation of the different orders of beings, and whose business is most immediately with God, who were made on purpose for those exercises that do respect God, and wherein they have nextly to do with God. For reason teaches that man was made to serve and glorify his creator. If it be rational to suppose that God immediately communicates himself to man in any affair, it is in this it is rational to suppose that God would reserve that knowledge and wisdom that is of such a divine and excellent nature to be bestowed immediately by himself, and that it should not be left in the power of second causes. Spiritual wisdom and grace is that highest and most excellent gift that ever God bestows on any creature. In this the highest excellency and perfection of a rational creature consists, it is also immensely the most important of all divine gifts.

It is that wherein man's happiness consists, and on which his everlasting welfare depends. How rational is it to suppose that God, however he has left meaner goods and lower gifts to second causes, and in some sort in their power, yet should reserve this most excellent, divine, and important of all divine communications in his own hands, to be bestowed immediately by himself as a thing too great for second causes to be concerned in it is rational to suppose that this blessing should be immediately from God, for there is no gift or benefit that is in itself so nearly related to the divine nature. There is nothing the creature receives that is so much of God of his nature, so much a participation of the deity. It is a kind of emanation of God's beauty, and is

related to God as the light is to the sun. It is therefore congruent and fit that when it is given of God, it should be nextly from himself, and by himself, according to his own sovereign will.

It is rational to suppose that it should be beyond a man's power to obtain this knowledge and light by the mere strength of natural reason. For it is not a thing that belongs to reason to see the beauty and loveliness of spiritual things. It is not a speculative thing, but depends on the sense of the heart. Reason indeed is necessary in order to it and it is by reason only that we become the subjects of the means of it, which means, I have already shown, to be necessary in order to it, though they have no power causal in the affair. It is by reason that we become possessed of a notion of those doctrines that are the subject matter of this divine light.

And reason may many ways be indirectly and remotely in advantage to it and reason has also to do in the acts that are immediately consequent on this discovery. A seeing the truth of religion from hence is by reason, though it be but by one step, and the inference be immediate. So reason has to do in that accepting of and trusting in Christ that is consequent on it. But if we take reason strictly, not for the faculty of mental perception in general, but for radio sensation, or a power of inferring by arguments the perceiving of spiritual beauty and excellency no more belongs to reason than it belongs to the sense of feeling to perceive colors, or to the power of seeing to perceive the sweetness of food. It is out of reason's province to perceive the beauty or loveliness of anything.

Such a perception does not belong to that faculty. Reason's work is to perceive truth and not excellency. It is not radiocination that gives men the perception of the beauty and amiableness of a countenance, though it may be many ways, indirectly an advantage to it. Yet it is no more reason that immediately perceives it than it is reason that perceives the sweetness of honey. It depends on the sense of the heart.

Reason may determine that a countenance is beautiful to others it may determine that honey is sweet to others, but it will never give me a perception of its sweetness. I will conclude with a very brief improvement of what has been said. First, this doctrine may

lead us to reflect on the goodness of God that has so ordered it that a saving evidence of the truth of the gospel is such as is attainable by persons of mean capacities and advantages, as well as those that are of the greatest parts and learning. If the evidence of the gospel depended only on history, and such reasonings as learned men only are capable of, it would be above the reach of far the greatest part of mankind. But persons with but an ordinary degree of knowledge are capable, without a long and subtile train of reasoning, to see the divine excellency of the things of religion.

They are capable of being taught by the spirit of God, as well as learned men. The evidence that is this way obtained is vastly better and more satisfying than all that can be obtained by the arguings of those that are most learned and greatest masters of reason and babes are as capable of knowing these things as the wise and prudent and they are often hid from these things, as the wise and prudent and they are often hid from these when they are revealed to those one corinthians 126 and 27 for ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world. Secondly, this doctrine may well put us upon examining ourselves, whether we have ever had this divine light that has been described let into our souls, if there be such a thing indeed, and it be not only a notion or whimsy of persons with weak and distempered brains, then doubtless it is a thing of great importance. Whether we have thus been taught by the spirit of God whether the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, hath shined unto us, giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, whether we have seen the son, and believed on him, or have that faith of gospel doctrines which arises from a spiritual sight of Christ. Thirdly, all may hence be exhorted earnestly to seek this spiritual light, to influence and move to it.

The following things may be considered one. This is the most excellent and divine wisdom that any creature is capable of. It is more excellent than any human learning. It is far more excellent than all the knowledge of the greatest philosophers or statesmen. Yea, the least glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Christ, doth more exalt and ennoble the soul than all the knowledge of those that have the greatest

speculative understanding in divinity.

Without grace. This knowledge has the most noble object that is, or can be, viz. The divine glory or excellency of God in Christ. The knowledge of these objects is that wherein consists the most excellent knowledge of the angels, yea, of God himself. Two, this knowledge is that which is above all others, sweet and joyful.

Men have a great deal of pleasure in human knowledge, in studies of natural things but this is nothing to that joy which arises from this divine light shining into the soul. This light gives a view of these things that are immensely the most exquisitely beautiful, and capable of delighting the eye of the understanding. This spiritual light is the dawning of the light of glory in the heart. There is nothing so powerful as this to support persons in affliction, and to give the mind peace and brightness in the stormy and dark world. Three.

This light is such as effectually influences the inclination and changes the nature of the soul it assimilates the nature to the divine nature, and changes the soul into an image of the same glory that is beheld. Two Corinthians 3:18. But we all with open face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord. This knowledge will wean from the world, and raise the inclination to heavenly things. It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion.

This light, and this only, will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ. It conforms the heart to the gospel, mortifies its enmity and opposition against the scheme of salvation therein revealed. It causes the heart to embrace the joyful tidings, and entirely to adhere to and acquiesce in the revelation of Christ as our savior. It causes the whole soul to accord and symphonize with it, admitting it with entire credit and respect, cleaving to it with full inclination and affection and it effectually disposes the soul to give up itself entirely to Christ. Four.

This light, and this only has its fruit in a universal holiness of life. No merely notional or speculative understanding of the doctrines of religion will ever bring to this but this light, as it reaches the bottom of the heart and changes the nature, so it will

effectually dispose to a universal obedience it shows God's worthiness to be obeyed and served it draws forth the heart in a sincere love to God, which is the only principle of a true, gracious and universal obedience and it convinces of the reality of those glorious rewards that God has promised to them that obey him.