

A Revival of Illumination: Part 2

By David de Bruyn

Among Christians, there is an epidemic of boredom with Christianity. Though we are saturated with Biblical facts and knowledge, we lack a real joy and excitement for those facts. We saw last week why this is: a lack of illumination. A.W. Tozer said:

"The sum of what I am saying is that there is an illumination, divinely bestowed, without which theological truth is information and nothing more. While this illumination is never given apart from theology, it is entirely possible to have theology without the illumination. This results in what has been called "dead orthodoxy," and while there may be some who deny that it is possible to be both orthodox and dead at the same time I am afraid experience proves that it is."

Our experience confirms it. People forsaking the local church, people bored with preaching and ever seeking some new Christian resource or experience, hoping it will excite their souls. Instead of Christians turning to the source of the message – the Holy Spirit – and seeking His grace to see the beauty of the Word as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1, there is a flurry of activity, aiming to dress the truth and make it more appealing.

As we saw, it will not work. To the natural man, the things of God are foolishness and impossible to discern. We can paraphrase that. To the man walking apart from the Spirit, Christian truth is boring and tiresome to try and understand. That might be something agreeable if we were merely talking about unbelievers. But sadly, among Christians there is a chronic state of dullness and dryness of soul. And it comes back to a lack of illumination, says Tozer:

"There is a difference between the intellectual knowledge of God and the Spirit-revealed knowledge... modern orthodoxy has made a great blunder in the erroneous assumption that spiritual truths can be intellectually perceived... Until a man receives that illumination – that inward enlightenment – he will not have anything because Bible study does not, of itself, lift the veil or penetrate it... There is the Christ whom only the Spirit can reveal... you may be convinced that He is the Son of God and still never find Him as the living Person He is. Jesus Christ must be revealed by the Holy Ghost – no man knows the things of God but by the Holy Ghost... the final flash that introduces your heart to Jesus must be by that illumination of the Holy Spirit Himself, or it isn't done at all."

1 Corinthians 2 makes it plain that the Spirit of God must take the Word of God to truly unveil the glory of God. That it must happen is clear from Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. But once we have agreed that illumination is necessary, we must answer the question, "How does it happen?"

We know that it is an act of grace – it is something the Holy Spirit does for us in love. He opens our eyes. However, it is equally clear that this sovereign act of love from the Holy Spirit also has a counterpart in our human responsibility. There are some things we need to do for illumination to become the norm, instead of the exception. So, how do we receive instruction and illumination from the Spirit?

1. Firstly, we must humbly admit we need illumination

This is the most obvious, but probably the most overlooked, step. In order to be illuminated, we must ask to be illuminated! Why doesn't God just do it anyway? The answer has to do with God's glory. God says in **Isaiah 42:8**: *"I am the LORD: that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images." God is jealous for His name.*

Now, if God wrote the Word, and wrote it to reveal Himself – do you not think that He would also seek to retain the glory for being the One who explains the Word? If the Word was a book that could be fully understood by unbelieving professors of literature, if it could be known intimately by simply analysing its grammar and syntax, if it could be understood simply by the normal human means of study – who would get the glory?

Firstly, man would get the glory for using his powers of intelligence to understand the Word. Secondly, it would reduce the Bible to simply another human book that can be understood apart from divine intervention or assistance. But God's Word is alive – and those living Words are incomprehensible parables to those who will not humbly come to God for the answers.

They are mere fairy-tales for those who proudly resist God. They are filled with contradictions and inconsistencies to the one who has pre-judged them to be untrustworthy. They are simply ancient examples of literature to the detached, academic mind. And they can be no more than mere words on a page to the proud Christian.

But to the humble seeker, they can light up to be what they are – words of life. God's living Words. It ought to be a very obvious fact, but it is something we have completely stumbled over in modern Christianity: the beauty of God's truth must be shown to us by God Himself. I am not speaking of extra-biblical revelation or any kind of supposed mystical experience – I am talking about God giving understanding to the humble heart that seeks it.

This is found throughout Scripture. **Psalms 25:9** says: *"He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way."* He delights to teach the humble because the humble person gives His teacher all the glory. They say, 'I don't know, but God, my teacher, does. I learn from Him. I cannot find out apart from Him.'

Psalms 119:18 articulates the cry of the humble: *"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."* Why does the Psalmist need their eyes opened? Because they recognise that God's Word is of such a nature that all the diligent study in the world will not help unless God unveils the truth.

The very fact that believers and unbelievers read the same book shows that there is something beyond the printed words on the page; there is the Spirit's illumination of those words. And the first stage to receiving that is to admit you need it, and ask.

Say, 'God, open my eyes. Eyes cannot see, ears cannot hear, brains cannot realise what you have prepared for us – but your Spirit can reveal it. Show me your glory in the Word. Let the eyes of my heart be enlightened to see not only the truth, but the glory of the truth.'

Now some might misconstrue what we are saying as being a rejection of hard study. There always seem to be two camps on this issue. The one extreme glorifies studying and the human mind to the point of being rationalistic. They say, 'God spoke. It simply up to you to see exactly what the grammar means. You don't require anything more than some good study tool.' They deny the very need for illumination.

But the other camp becomes so shy and nervous of anything intellectual, that they dismiss it all as pride, and ironically then pride themselves on their lack of study. But illumination will come to neither group. God will not illuminate the rationalists because they are too proud to admit they need it, and He will not illuminate the second group because they are lazy and refusing to obey His command to diligently search the Scriptures.

2. Secondly, we need hard thinking for illumination

Notice Paul's words in **2 Timothy 2:7**: *"Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."* Paul says, 'Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Timothy, do some hard thinking. Seriously meditate on the Word – and then what? You'll figure it out? No – the Lord will give you understanding.' There's the human responsibility and God's sovereignty.

When Timothy does the hard searching and thinking, God will grant the understanding. This is very clear from the Scriptures. God's illumination does not come on the heels of a slack, careless attitude toward the Scriptures. Careful, purposeful, diligent study of the Scriptures is the pre-requisite to receiving illumination from God. Note the clear cause and effect that Solomon records in Proverbs:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 2:1-6

Verses 1 to 4 describe the diligent, wholehearted attitude one has when approaching the Word. Receive the Word, hide it, incline your ear to it, apply your mind to it, cry out for it, lift up your voice for it, seek it, search for it like you would a hidden stash of rubies. If this is how you

approach it, verse 5 says, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

But notice the last verse: *"For the Lord gives wisdom: from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding."* You do the diligent searching, and you will find – not because you are so smart or so hardworking – but because the Lord gives wisdom. He graciously chooses to illuminate when we apply ourselves to a diligent search of the Word.

See, some Christians cry out for illumination, but they never do much searching. They want the Holy Spirit to come and ignite the truth in the fireplace of their heart, but all they have sitting there is a tiny dry twig of truth. Even if He does illuminate that, it is so little, it hardly causes enough heat to warm their souls and carry them through the day.

On the other extreme, we have people who study and search diligently. They work hard, wrestling with the texts, but they never ask God to illuminate, to give wisdom and understanding, to teach them. They are like people who instead of a mere twig in the fireplace of their hearts, have big, thick, logs in there. But they never ask for the Holy Spirit to illuminate what they have studied – so the heaps of truth sit coldly in the fireplace of their heart, never ignited to warm them, only present, like some sort of ornament.

We need both the humility to ask God for understanding, as well as the discipline to study as we should. There is both the humility to desire illumination, and the maturity to study. We see this beautiful balance in Scriptures.

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 so 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 whomsoever the Son will reveal him.'

Matthew 11:25-27

Here Jesus points out something very clear about illumination. God deliberately hides the treasures of the beauty of Christ from the wise and prudent. That is not a reference to Christlike wisdom and prudence, but to the wise of the world – those wise in their own eyes.

People who glory in their own intelligence and academic ability do not look to God in humble dependence to understand the Word, and God veils the truth from their eyes. Paul speaks on this at length in 1 Corinthians:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21

And parts of **1 Corinthians 1:26-29** add, *“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 to confound the wise... That no flesh should glory in His presence.”*

So Jesus says the Father hides understanding from the wise, and allows them to be wise in their own eyes. They are the ones who Paul said were ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. In contrast, however, Jesus said the Father had revealed these things to babes.

By this, Jesus refers to the simple, open-minded disciples, who, though they lacked the knowledge of the Pharisees, had the humility to ask Jesus what He meant by His parables, and who desired God to illuminate them. Like children, they looked helplessly up to the Father to give them understanding – admitting their ignorance, admitting their weakness to understand apart from God. Thus God was pleased to illuminate the Scriptures to them.

A second Scripture though shows us the beauty of hard, earnest study: *“Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature” (1 Corinthians 14:20).* Now, does God want us to be like babes, like children, or not? Here’s the delightful balance of Scripture. God wants us to be childlike, but not childish. He wants us to be childlike in our humility – but not childish in our thinking.

We are to be mature thinkers. We are to study hard, think hard, wrestle with the Scriptures. We do not depend upon the arm of the flesh, but we struggle with His energy that works mightily in us. We consecrate our minds to Him, applying all of our mental abilities to try and understand the Scriptures, while waiting on Him to truly illuminate us.

In this way, we are the childlike ones He is pleased to reveal truth to, and yet mature ones in our thinking – that He is pleased to reveal truth to.

3. Thirdly, we need honest preparation for illumination

There is a third Biblical prerequisite that we find in Scripture when it comes to illumination. James 1 speaks clearly on what we might call the honesty before the Word:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness [filthiness and rampant wickedness], and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

James 1:19-24

James talks of a man who goes to a mirror, sees himself, but makes no corrections. In other words, there was no real reason why he went to them mirror in the first place. It was dishonest

of him to stand in front of that mirror, because he never intended to change. It was deceitful, a waste of time. Maybe it was just for conscience sake. He knows that people look in the mirror before they go out in public, so he does that, but then forgets right away. It is the same with the Word of God.

If we would be illuminated, we must come with the honesty that says, 'I am here to be changed.' Notice James' first instruction: 'Be quick to hear, slow to speak.' Someone who is quick to speak and slow to hear is not interested in changing. If you want God to turn on the light, then you need to quiet down, stop arguing with yourself, with others and with God, and say with Samuel, *"Speak Lord, for your servant heareth"* (**1 Samuel 16:7**).

Too often, the reason we never experience illumination is we are so busy telling God what we think, and what we believe, that we are never still enough to hear His Spirit. That still, small voice. Not only is honesty demonstrated by listening with a view to changing, it's demonstrated by taking correction without anger. James says we should be slow to anger, because sinful anger does not work the righteousness of God. Sinful anger will never produce illumination.

As **Ephesians 4:30-31** puts it, *"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."* **1 Peter 2:1-2** echoes the same idea: *"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."*

Honesty means I really do want to hear what God has to say, I am willing to change, and not get mad at God when He corrects me. It also means I am willing to confess and forsake my sin. Look at the next instruction: *"Lay aside filthiness and rampant wickedness."* We teach our children to wash their hands before they come to the table and eat. Likewise, before you come to God's table, you need to be spiritually cleansed.

There needs to be a confession of known sin in our lives, and a desire to forsake and depart from it. This is honesty for two reasons – firstly, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (**1 John 1:8**). Secondly, why should God give you more truth, if you are not trying to honestly obey what He has already given you?

We are going to fail, but if we confess, and truly repent, there is grace. There is enough forgiveness in Calvary for the worst of sins. But if you have no desire to change, and have no remorse over sin, you are not being a good steward of the truth God has already given you. Why should He give you more?

Honesty says, 'I want to hear from God. I want to change. I want to lay aside what offends God and be more like Him.' Is that the kind of honesty that you approach the Scriptures with? Is that your attitude before the preaching at church? Is that your attitude before you pick up the Bible? Apart from that attitude, we will not truly hear from the Spirit of God.

So we have two choices before us – continue to accumulate knowledge, which we are secretly bored with, while never truly changing – or seek the illumination of the Spirit of God –

beholding His glory. Do you know all a revival is? It's when people truly see God. It's when people see who God really is – and who they really are, and they repent and confess, and rededicate and rejoice.

A revival is not usually some new information. It is when people are ready for God to unveil their eyes. God then takes the old, old story, and allows such people to see it in all its glory. May we seek with all our hearts for the understanding and wisdom that comes from above, as we diligently search and study the Scriptures. We need a revival of illumination.