



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 7.3.4 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

Illumination and Enlightenment

The beginning of faith in Christ in an individual can be pictured as coming out of the darkness into the light. This is what is meant by the terms “illumination” and “enlightenment”. The apostle Paul said that his assignment as missionary to the Gentiles was **“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me”** (Acts 26:18). Being without faith in Christ is like being in the darkness, but knowing Jesus and His blessings is like being in the light. The apostle Peter used the same picture when he wrote to the Christians in his care: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9).

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul compared God’s creation of the spiritual light of faith with God’s creation of light on the first day of world history: **“It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Corinthians 4:6). Notice that God is the Creator of spiritual light just as He is the Creator of physical light, and this creation of light is accomplished in both cases by His Word.

The difference between darkness and light is not only a difference between unbelief and faith, but between evil and good. Paul says: **“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them”** (Ephesians 5:8-11). How can we tell the difference between the works of darkness and the goodness that comes from the Spirit? The psalmist answers: **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”** (Psalm 119:105).

It is important that we remember that spiritual light does not come from within ourselves but from an outside source; it comes from the Holy Spirit using the Word of God, just as God created physical light on the first day of creation using His Word when He said: **“Let there be light”** (Genesis 1:3). George Fox, the founder of the religious group known as the Quakers, claimed that true spiritual light comes from within a person. He called this “the Inner Light”, and taught his followers to look for this inner light within themselves. But the Holy Spirit does His work by shining the light of the Gospel in a person’s heart; this light comes from the Holy Spirit through the Word, as it is written: **“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”** (1 Corinthians 1:21).

The means of enlightenment is not the law of God, for Paul claims: **“By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:20). The Holy Spirit does not bring about enlightenment by leading us to be more obedient to His law by gradual steps until finally we are enlightened and do what is right. God’s law has only a negative role in showing us our sin. Enlightenment does not come until Christ Jesus and His grace are proclaimed to us. For it is written: **“He called you by our Gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2:14). It is **“the prophetic word”** that we are **“to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”** (2 Peter 1:19). How did the Holy Spirit do His work of enlightenment of the Gentiles through Paul? He preached **“among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”** (Ephesians 3:8). As the psalmist said: **“The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple”** (Psalm 119:130).

Questions:

1. What is spiritual darkness, and what is spiritual light?
2. Who brings us out of spiritual darkness into the light?
3. How are we brought out of spiritual darkness into the light?
4. Where did George Fox say we should look for the light?
5. What is wrong with George Fox's teaching on this matter?
6. Prove that the Holy Spirit does His work of enlightening through the Gospel.
7. What purpose does the Law serve in enlightening those in the dark?