

**Eternal Spirit! We Confess***Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

Eternal Spirit! we confess  
 And sing the wonders of Thy grace;  
 Thy power conveys our blessings down  
 From God the Father and the Son.

Enlightened by Thy heavenly ray,  
 Our shades and darkness turn to day;  
 Thine inward teachings make us know  
 Our danger and our refuge too.

Thy glorious power works within,  
 And breaks the chains of reigning sin.  
 Doth our imperious lusts subdue,  
 And forms our wretched hearts anew.

The troubled conscience knows Thy voice,  
 Thy cheering words awake our joys;  
 Thy words allay the stormy wind,  
 And calm the surges of the mind.

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***The Agent of Illumination***Kevin T. Bauder*

Unsaved people in their natural state do not receive or welcome the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). Divine truth seems foolish to them because it is spiritually discerned. While they can exegete texts and can grasp what the Bible says, they cannot appreciate its relevance or know its significance because they reject the Bible's frame of reference. The truth that they grasp is useless to them since they do not know it as it ought to be known.

In the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul dwells at length on the contrast between the wisdom of the unsaved world (which is ultimately foolish) and the (ultimately wise) foolishness of God (1:18–31). He states that he explicitly repudiated displays of human wisdom in his presentation of the divine truth (2:1–5). Instead, he affirmed the wisdom of God, the rejection of which led the rulers of this world to crucify the Lord of glory (2:6–8). The divine wisdom focuses upon the crucified Christ (1:17–18; 2:2). This hidden wisdom (i.e., Christ crucified) is what God has ordained before the world to the glory of His people (2:7).

At this point in his discourse, Paul writes one of the most frequently misunderstood statements in all of Scripture: “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (2:9). This verse is commonly understood to be talking about the glories of heaven, as if heaven were such a wonderful place that we cannot even imagine it ahead of time. While it is certainly true that we cannot imagine how blessed heaven will be, that idea is completely foreign to this context.

Rather, Paul has been talking about God's hidden wisdom. It is wisdom that has been rejected by the wise and powerful of this world. It cannot be discerned through natural observation or invented through natural imagination. Nevertheless, God formed His plan according to this eternal wisdom, which comes to a focal point in the cross work of Christ. What God prepared for those who love Him is not merely heaven, but all of salvation and everything that God had to do to secure it.

If this wisdom cannot be known through natural observation or invented through natural imagination, then how could anyone ever receive it? Paul



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answers this question in only one way: God revealed it. Revelation may be defined as the disclosure by God to humans of truth that they did not know and could not otherwise have known. Paul's point is that natural observation and imagination cannot arrive at true knowledge of the things that God has prepared for His people, but God has Himself revealed them (2:10).

Furthermore, He revealed these things through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent of divine revelation (cf. 2 Pet 1:20–21). The Spirit can be the revealer because He searches and knows the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10).

Paul illustrates his point by appealing to the analogy of the human spirit (2:11). Each of us has a self-conscious awareness that knows things about us to which no one else has access. Our spirit knows our inner states, our thoughts, our imaginations, and our dispositions, none of which is available for inspection by other human beings. By analogy, God's Holy Spirit knows exhaustively all of God's hidden workings. This complete knowledge of God and His ways is what enables the Spirit to act as the agent of revelation.

Furthermore, this same Spirit who knows the things of God has been given to us (2:12). God's purpose in giving us His Spirit is at least partly so that we might know the hidden things that God has prepared for us. In other words, the Spirit has not only revealed what God is doing, but He also helps us to understand that revelation. The rest of the context illustrates how that understanding works.

Paul next references "the things we speak" (2:13). This is a reference to divine revelation, which was communicated by the Spirit through the apostles and prophets. The apostle denies that knowledge of these things came through human wisdom. As the Holy Spirit communicated these things, He did so by comparing spirituals with spirituals—probably meaning that spiritual communication is required for spiritual truth.

Paul is not suggesting that the Holy Spirit invented a new language for revealing spiritual truth. Nor is he denying that unbelievers—people who do not have the Spirit—can understand the words and propositions in which spiritual truth is communicated. Nevertheless, something in their understanding is disabled so that spiritual truth seems like foolishness to them (2:14). They cannot know it and they do not welcome it.

On the other hand, those who love God have been given His Spirit. Because they have the Spirit, they are capable of discerning all things (2:15). That is to say, they welcome spiritual truth and it makes sense to them. They perceive how it affects their lives. According to a parallel passage, they are "able to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14).

Students of Scripture debate the meaning of "he that is spiritual" in 1 Corinthians 2:14. Some apply this language to all believers, since all believers have been given the Spirit. Others apply the language only to those believers who

have yielded themselves to the Spirit and who wish to obey Him. Still others apply it only to believers who have been brought to maturity by the Spirit. What all three of these perspectives agree upon is that the ability to receive and apply Scripture rightly depends upon the Holy Spirit. He was the agent of revelation, and He continues to be the agent of spiritual understanding. He is the one who takes the words of revelation and helps the believer to appreciate their significance.

This, then, is illumination. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to grasp and welcome the significance of divine revelation. Illumination does not replace the discipline of study. It is not a shortcut that eliminates the need for careful interpretation of the text. Illumination is indispensable, however, in knowing what to do with the text and in perceiving its relevance to one's own life.

The Holy Spirit must begin a work of illumination before any unbeliever will ever understand and receive the gospel. The Spirit must continue to perform this work for all believers as they wrestle with the text of Scripture. While He does not interpret the Bible for us, He does help us to understand the significance of the text. He shows us the difference that it ought to make in our lives. Illumination is that work of the Holy Spirit by means of which He helps believers to understand the significance of revelation as they incorporate it into their lives.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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