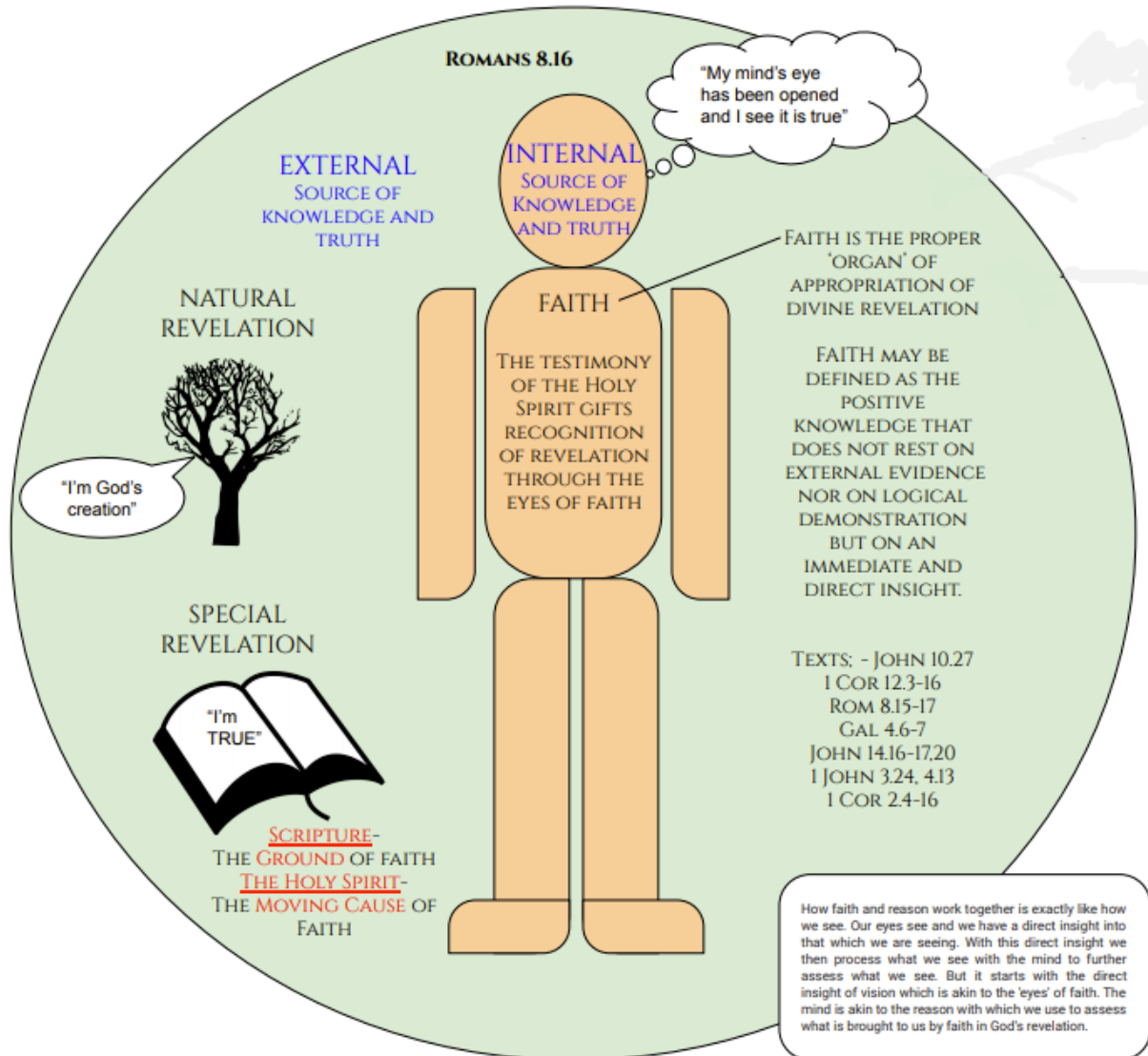


# THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## HOW FAITH WORKS TO SHOW US TRUTH. HOW MAN RECEIVES AND APPROPRIATES DIVINE REVELATION



### **Four Incorrect 'organs' With Which Man Attempts to Ultimately Discover the truth regarding The Revelation Of God.**

#### **1.Human Understanding (General apologetics and Empiricism)-**

The historico-apologetical method does not meet with approval from the theological point of view, because it under rates both religious truth and faith. Religious truth is not like some theorem of science, and faith is not purely intellectual insight into some result of scientific investigation. This does scant justice to the Christian religion. The Word of God presupposes the darkness and error of the natural man, and would therefore contradict itself, if it submitted itself to the judgement of that man. It would thereby acknowledge one as judge whom it had first disqualified. Finally this method does not lead to the desired result. In the

beginning of the previous century miracles and prophecies could serve as proofs, but in the present day they themselves require proof.

This does not mean, however, that apologetics is devoid of all real value. It might undoubtedly serve a useful purpose in some respects, but cannot, without forfeiting its theological character, proceed faith or prove the truth of revelation a priori. A threefold value may be ascribed to it:

- a) It compels theology to give an account of its contents and the grounds on which it rests and thus promotes theological self-consciousness.
- b) It makes the Christian conscious of the fact that he need not feel embarrassed in the presence of the enemy, but find supporting nature and history, in science and art, and in the heart and conscience of every man.
- c) Though it cannot of itself bring any man to the acknowledgement of the truth by compelling proofs, it may, like the ministry of the Word, give him a profound impression of the truth, which you cannot easily shake off.

## **2.Speculative Reason (Rationalism)-**

The great question is, Do we think of thing because it exists, or does it exist because we necessarily think it. Speculative philosophy claims the latter, but without any warrant. It takes an impossible leap. The existence of a thing does not follow from the fact that we think it, for existence is not an emanation of thought, but rests on an act of power. It is true that God thought things eternally, but He brought the things which existed ideally into real existence only by a creative act. We can only reflect on what God thought long before and has creatively brought to our consciousness in the existing world of reality. If we reject all that comes to us from without, we retain only a vague principle without any content, from which nothing can be derived.

Notwithstanding its high pretensions and it's, ostensibly, good intentions, the speculative method did not succeed in changing the despised doctrines of the Christian religion into a philosophical system of universal truth, quite acceptable to the world. The word of the cross remain foolishness to them that perish. It broke away from the objective basis of God's revelation, and therefore could not succeed in constructing a real system of theology.

## **3.Religious Intuition (Devout Feeling)-**

There are many objections to this starting point and method.

- a). Regeneration and all other experiences of the Christian are always connected with the objective factors of the Church, the Scriptures, and so on, while this position divorces the two.
- b) The method in which is derived the objective dogmata from the certainty of the Christian, is one that does not fit in theology. It is borrowed from speculative philosophy, which derives religious truth from the necessity of logical coherence.
- c) This method goes contrary to all religious experience. No Christian obtained certainty respecting objective truths in this manner. The application of this method carries with it a threefold danger;
  - 1. It easily leads into the danger of forming a wrong conception of religious experience, and expecting from it what it cannot yield. While it is possible to experience certain emotions, such as those of penitence, fear, hope, and so on, it is not possible to experience historical facts.

2. It really makes it impossible for uneducated Christians to obtain knowledge and certainty respecting the historical facts of Christianity, since these can only be deduced from experience by an elaborate process of reasoning.

3. It is apt to rob historical Christianity ever increasingly of its real significance. Experience is loaded down with a burden which it cannot bear. The truth of Christianity cannot rest on it as a final ground. And the consciousness of this may easily lead to a reduction of the burden by divorcing the contents of faith from all historical facts and limiting it to Religious and ethical experiences.

#### **4.The Moral Consciousness-**

This and the immediately preceding method undoubtedly deserve to be preferred above the historical and speculative methods. The method now under consideration does not regard religion merely as a doctrine to be proved, nor as a condition of the subject to be analysed intellectually, as the first two methods do respectively. It looks upon the Christian religion as a historical, objective power and answers to the moral needs of Man, and finds in this its proof and justification. Nevertheless there are serious objections to this method.

a) Though a religion that does not satisfy the religious and ethical life, that offers no comfort in sorrow and death, and does not give strength unto the battles of life, is not worthy of the name of religion; yet the fact that the Christian religion does this, is no absolute proof of its truth, since there are other religions which also give a certain degree of satisfaction in this respect.

b) It is dangerous to make the truth of Christianity dependent upon judgements of value. There would be no great objection, if we only intended to stress the fact that a dogma must always have religious and ethical value, or that intellectual reasoning can never give us perfect certainty respecting religious truths, while this can be obtained by experiencing the religious values expressed by the dogmas. In that case the subjective evaluation would presuppose the objective reality of the religious truths and would only serve as a means to obtain certainty respecting that reality. Then the value of a thing would not be represented as the ground of its existence, but would simply enable us to acknowledge it subjectively.

c) In this way we can never reach objectivity. The needs that find satisfaction in the Christian faith are virtually created by the same faith through the work of the ministry. Hence the question arises, whether those needs are really in the life of Man, or have merely been awakened artificially and are therefore purely imaginary. In other words, the question of the truths of the Christian religion remains.

#### **FAITH, the correct 'organ' With Which Man Ultimately Discovers the truth regarding The Revelation Of God.**

Men sometimes speak of believing and knowing as opposites, but in such cases they use the word 'believe' in the weak sense of having an opinion for which the proper evidence is lacking. The word faith however has a far more profound meaning as seen in the definition above. In that sense it can ever be said to be fundamental to all the sciences. Intuitive knowledge and immediate insight occupy an important place in human life. There is not a single field of endeavour, nor a single phase of life in which we can get along without it.

#### **The distinctive nature of the knowledge of faith**

The correspondence between general and religious knowledge should not cause us to lose sight of the existing difference. There is a very important difference between faith in the sense of immediate certainty and faith in the religious sense. In the Christian religion faith has a unique significance, as the following points will show.

a) In the New Testament it denotes a religious relation of man to God, and includes not only a certain knowledge, that is, an assured knowledge, also a heartfelt trust in God, a complete surrender to Him, and a personal appropriation of the promises of the gospel.

b) While the faith we exercise in connection with the external world, for instance with respect to the reliability of our senses, the pertinency of the laws of thought, and so on, rest on our own inner observation, Christian faith is directed to that which is invisible and cannot be observed, Heb 11.1.

c) Faith in the religious sense is distinguished from that in the sense of immediate certainty in this, that it rests on the insight of others rather than on our own. We are made acquainted with the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the testimony of prophets and apostles.

d) Finally, Christian faith differs from faith as immediate certainty also in the fact that it does not arise spontaneously in human nature. While it is perfectly human, and may even be called the restoration of human nature, it grates on the pride of the natural man and arouses hostility in his heart. God is not only its object, but also its Author. God's revelation gives birth to the response. According to scripture faith carries its own certainty with it. It does this, not because it is so firm and certain in itself, but because it rests on the testimony and the promises of God. It makes the invisible blessings of salvation just a certain for man, yea even more certain, than his own insight or any scientific proof can ever make anything. Scripture represents certainty as one of the characteristics of faith. Alongside the certainty of science we have, therefore, the certainty of faith, practically demonstrated in the believing Church, in its martyrs and steadfast confessors, and theoretically professed in developed in Christian theology. It is a certainty that is unwavering and indestructible. But this faith does not necessarily involve the truth of that which is believed. There is a great difference between subjective certainty and objective truth. In this respect everything depends on the grounds on which faith rests.

### **The ground of faith**

By faith we accept the testimony of God as it is contained in scripture. But now the question arises **how do we know that the testimony is true**, and therefore perfectly reliable? What is the ground on which our faith in the word of God rests? Or, perhaps better still, By what means is this conviction respecting the truth of the special revelation of God wrought in our hearts? In answer to these questions Reformed theologians point to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Calvin absolutely rejected the idea that the authority of scripture rests on the testimony of the Church, as well as some other erroneous views. He finally says:

*“Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by Him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgement or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgement, feel perfectly assured- as much so as if we had beheld the*

*divine image visibly impressed on it- that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God.” (institutes 1. 7,5)*

The testimony of the Holy Spirit is simply the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sinner, by which he removes the blindness of sin, so that the erstwhile blind man, who had no eyes for the sublime character of the Word for God, now clearly sees and appreciates the marks of its divine nature, and receives immediate certainty respecting the divine origin of scripture. Just as one who has an eye for the beauties of architecture in gazing up into the dome of St. Peter's church in Rome, at once recognizes it as the production of a great artist, so the believer in the study of scripture discovers in it at once the earmarks of the divine.

Redeemed souls behold God is the Author of scripture and rest on its testimony by childlike faith. It is exactly the characteristic mark of such faith that it rests on a testimony of God, with a divine faith. While a human faith merely rests on a human testimony or on rational arguments. Of course, rational arguments may be adduced for the divine origin of scripture, but these are powerless to convince the unrenowned man. The Christian believes the Bible to be the very word of God in the last analysis on the testimony which God himself gives respecting this matter in his Word, and recognises that Word is divine by means of the testimony of God in his heart. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is therefore, strictly speaking, not so much the final ground of faith, but rather that means of faith. The final ground of faith is scripture only, or better still, the authority of God which is impressed upon the believer in the testimony of scripture. The ground of faith is identical with its contents, and cannot be separated from it. But the testimony of the Holy Spirit is the moving cause of faith. We believe scripture, not because of, but through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

*Source-Louis Berkhof The Principa of Dogmatics*