

The Light upon the Candlestick

1662 - Attributed to William Ames, but possibly written by Peter Balling or Adam Boreel

<https://universalistfriends.org/candle.html>

[Things are not for words, but words for things -- if therefore we understand things aright and as they ought, by words, it must be by such as are fit to imprint the things themselves in those to whom they should occur, and then it were enough (to make known our thoughts to others as we conceive them) only to make use of such words.

But forasmuch as we find the matter in this case far otherwise, and that two men speaking or writing the same words, may nevertheless have different, yea, sometimes contrary thoughts, the disability of performing this fitly by words or discourse, is clearly inferred. Nor may we at all wonder at it, seeing we know to what a perpetual change languages are subject, even such that the very words may be changed from their pristine signification. And the imperfection is so great, that whosoever should have invented them, such as now they are in use, we should certainly believe that he had little or no knowledge of those things that are thereby intended to be signified. So that if we would better express things unto another by words and speeches, we had need find new words, and consequently a whole new language: But that would be a toyle and labour indeed.

In the mean while we see what a Sea of Confusion flows from hence to all mankind: For although there should be none who sometimes through ignorance, and sometimes by subtilty or wickedness might rest or pervert words contrary to the mind of the speaker or writer, in such a manner as themselves that so do should think best for their own ends, from whence consequently all this deceit, slandering, contention, and the like proceeds: yet so it is, that how upright or prudent soever a man goes to work in this matter, he nevertheless finds himself liable to mislead, or to be misled.

But although the case be thus with words and discourses at present in use, yet for all that, they are the most ready, and so far as I know, the fittest means to make known all our thoughts unto others by: And for this reason therefore, though so much confusion and deceit happens to arise from hence, that no man that hath but any experience, can be ignorant thereof: yet may we not (therefore) be too much afraid of them neither, as many do manifest themselves to be, who because they have some experience hereof, are apt to believe we are about to deceive them, especially if they be but forewarned thereof.

This, as in many things, so it hath chiefly taken place in that which is commonly esteemed for Religion: In which 'tis so with most men, that they will scarce give audience to, much less take into consideration any thing held forth unto them by any whom they judge not to be of their own opinion, to avoid as they imagine, being thereby deluded.

Yet if they were thus towards their own Party, we might think it was an act of prudence, and that they would see with their own eyes: But no, in no wise, this is too hard a task: whatsoever cometh on that side, is received with such partiality for good and current Coyne, as if there were no danger nor possibility of erring: whereas nevertheless it is all alike with the one as with the other opinion. It all depends but upon a possibility of being nearest to the Truth: and for the upholding every one his own opinion, and defending against others, there's so much ado, so much pains taken, so much Scholastic Learning, study and disputing, that one would rather believe that there were no true Religion at all, then that this should needs be it.

Seeing then 'tis thus at present, can we much blame the common people, that they despair of ever being able to trim up this hurt, and are glad when they can but find any that are greedy of the Work, upon whom they may cast the whole burthen? Surely no: for he that sees but a little clearly sees, that there's always contention behind, and no end till a man grows weary of it: Nor is the Conquest just his that hath Truth, but that can best handle his Tongue. A miserable thing if it were this to be fought and found! But it is not so with the true Religion.]

Go to then, O man, who ever thou art, we will not draw thee off from one heap of men, to carry thee over unto another, 'tis somewhat else we invite thee to. Lend us but a little audience: Surely thou knowest thus much. That as it is an extremity to receive all things without distinction, that present themselves to us, so 'tis no less to reject all things without judgement. We invite thee to something which may be means to attain to thy own salvation and well-being: Be as distrustful, or rather prudent or foresighted as thou wilt, thou canst not in reason refuse us thy ear in this thing: All the damage thou canst possibly have by doing that which we exhort thee to, is only to have taken a little pain in vain, if that which is promised should not ensue: Whereas on the contrary; should it follow, thou mightest come to the enjoyment of a matter of so great a worth, that would not be exchanged for all that's esteemed great in the earth. Moreover, 'tis not far to seek, but at hand; 'tis nigh thee, yea and in thy self. And there thou mayest experience the trial of that which we declare, which is the most certain and sure that can be desired.

We direct thee then to within thyself, that is, that thou oughtest to turn into, to mind and have regard unto that which is within thee, to wit, *The Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighten every man that cometh into the world*. Here 'tis that thou must be, and not without thee. Here thou shalt find a Principle certain and infallible, and whereby increasing and going on therein, thou mayest at length arrive unto a happy condition: Of this thou mayest highly adventure the tryal. But if thou durst not do so much, 'tis hard to help thee. And if thou happenest to be one of those that wouldst know all things, before thou dost begin, yea, even those things which are experienced in a condition to which thou art so much a stranger, that there's nothing in thee hath so much agreement therewith, as to comprehend it according to truth: Know this, Thou dost (therein) just as those that would learn to Read, without knowing the Letters.

To desire to know all things that we are capable of, is good and laudable: But to go further, is folly. There will be alwayes something else to ask, and our knowledge will ever be too short. He that will not adventure till he be fully satisfied, shall never begin, much less finish it to his own salvation.

But we judge it needful (as much in us lyes) to open unto you that unto which we do exhort you, that people may understand what it properly is.

We say then, That we exhort every one to turn into the *Light*, that's in him (We give it rather the appellation of Light, than any thing else, otherwise it's all one to us whether ye call it, *Christ, the Spirit, the Word, &c.* seeing these all denote but one and the same thing): Yet the word *Light* being in all its natural signification somewhat else then that which we intend thereby, we shall therefore in brief endeavour clearly to express what we intend under this denomination.

The Light (then we say) *is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the Being and Quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof.*

From this definition which is here given of the *Light*, 'tis clear, that it must needs comprehend in it the principal effect of showing us, and giving us the knowledge of what's *Truth* and *Falsehood*, what's good and evil: which verily is a matter of so great concernment, that without it men must needs swerve up and down in continual darkness, opinion and sin, neither knowing truth at all, nor doing any good, but gropingly, by haphazard without any certainty.

This Light then, Christ the Truth, &c. is that which makes manifest and reprove sin in man, shewing him how he has strayed from God, accuseth him of the evil which he doth and hath committed; yea this is it which judgeth and condemmeth him: Again,

This is the preaching to every Creature under Heaven, though they have never read or heard of the Scripture. This is it which leads man into truth, into the way to God, which excuseth him in well-doing, giving him peace in his Conscience, yea, brings him into union with God, wherein all happiness and salvation doth consist.

Moreover, seeing it is properly the nature of this Light infallibly to discover sin and evil, *to reprove and convince thereof: it can never possibly consent thereunto.* And although it be true indeed, That the operations of the *Light* are not in all men alike powerful, in whom it is nevertheless: yea, (though) in some men (it) seems to have no operation at all: Yet this is occasioned only by those impediments that do hinder it: For as *the natural light* by the interposition of other bodies or covers, may be hindered from having its operation there where else it would, were those things which impede, removed, the *Light* (it self) still abiding in its self unchanged: Even so it is also with this *Light* whereof we speak. The lets in this are manifold. All whatsoever we meet in this world, seems to proclaim war in this case. What is there that hath no[t] a powerful operation upon one or other of the Sences of man, through which passing over into the soul, the memory is so filled, that nothing else can enter[?] The eyes and ears stand so perpetually open to all things, that they never want an object to bring to mind the experience of that which pleased the body so well. And this stirs up the desire to enjoy it, yet all without fascination: The objects are multifarious, the enjoyment can be but single and transient and the causes incessant.

Now where this operateth in us after this manner by education and example in manners and customs which are regulated by Opinion, and not by the *true Light*, that men live altogether therein, is it any wonder that here (in these men) there is so little, or no operation of the *Light*? Not at all.

We are so involved into the desire of that which is high in the World, so overwhelmed in pleasures, that its almost impossible for the *Light* to cause one desire after *Good* to spring or bubble up.

Where then these so contrary operations to the *Light* are, there it can never break through.

According to the nature and kind of everything is the operation thereof: Where they are opposite, the one must give way unto the other, and that which is most powerful prevails: from whence also the effects thereof become most visible. The *LIGHT* notwithstanding, abides always the same, & therefore although man by sin, through his love and union to corruptible things, comes to perish, be damned, and miss of his everlasting happiness, the *Light* nevertheless which is in every man that comes into the World, abides forever unchangeable.

The Light is also the first Principle of Religion. For seeing there can be no true Religion without the knowledge of God, and no knowledge of God without this *Light*, Religion must necessarily have this *Light* for its first Principle.

God being then known by this *Light* according to the measure of knowledge which the finite & circumscribed Creature can have of the Infinite and Uncircumscribable Creator, man hath obtained a *firm Foundation*, upon which he may build all firm and lasting things: A Principle whereby he may without ever erring, guide the whole course of his life, how he is to carry himself towards God, his Neighbor, and himself, and all things else, whereby he may happily attain unto his chiefest salvation, which consisteth only in *Union with God*. And thus this *Light* is therefore the *first Principle of Religion*.

Without this Light, there is no power or ability at all in man to do any good.

This must first raise him and quicken him out of the death of sin. 'Tis folly to expect anything, where nothing is, there's no effect without a cause: There must be something then which must cause a man to act, if he does anything.

And this cause must have in it whatsoever the effect produced hath in it: As for example: *Where any see, there must needs be LIGHT, if the effect of Light be produced, Light must do it, and nothing else.*

And therefore, is it not a silly thing that all men would have people do this or that as good, and leave this or that as evil, because they tell them so, without any more ado, or at best assigning only the accustomed motives wherefore, & think they have reason [to], just as this were enough? Who can see such effects are hereby required, included in this Cause? Not I, for my part.

Experience also teacheth us the same; else how could it all pass away in a train and custom, without any fruit? *These are therefore not the right means:* But such we must endeavor to furnish people with, Means from whence Power may issue forth to do that which they are exhorted to. Such is the nature of man, that he is forced to chuse that which he judgeth to be best, before the worst, and is always willing to change for the best.

Now if it so happens (as for the most part it doth) that a man chuseth the worst before the best, 'tis for the want of knowledge, and contrary to his aim, and so he erreth, not being led by the *true Light*.

Here then it should be begun, 'tis easie leading of a man to that which of himself he is desirous of: If those now who make it their Work to teach others, *were but Lead themselves by the true Light*, knowing better things [than] those to which the multitude are link't so fast with love, they would be able to hold them forth clearly to others: And so making it their continual work, 'twere impossible their labour should be fruitless, for people knowing better, would better do. Who remembers not our youth, how much we were in love therewith, and yet how ridiculous is it now unto us but to think upon it? And why? Because we now know that which we judge better: *Herehence*, not by force, but very lightly, and of it self, they came from time to time to be worn out; and pass away, that there's now no desire nor motion moving thereunto. How may we think then it would be, if the Spirit came but once to apprehend those things aright which infinitely transcend all bodily toys [amusements] in worth? which are durable and uncorruptible. So far as these toys then should come to be esteemed more glorious than all bodily things, so much the more powerful would be the annihilation of those things in which all men, even to old age, yea, death it self do take so much delight, and then we might hope and expect that those things which are (indeed) alone worthy to be known would gain entrance, & being brought forth in the *Light*, would be also owned and received by every one, according to the measure in which they should stand in the *same Light*.

Hence from within, the amendment and conversion is to be waited for, from within it must begin, if with foundation, the outward then will follow of it self: The weakest must give way to the strongest, all depends but upon the knowledge of something better, to make a true and lasting change. Therefore to hold this forth to men, is the best thing we can give them.

This Light is the inward ear by which alone, and by no other, the voice of God that is the Truth, can be heard.

By this alone must the sence and mind of him that would signifie any thing by words or any outward sign, be comprehended and understood. *So that if the Truth of God* be presented to a man who stands not in the *Light of Truth*, 'tis impossible he should understand it, although he hears and

comprehends the words after his manner, yet he is still fenced off from its true sence and meaning thereof.

Hence, therefore, it is, that amongst so many hearers there are so few that have ears to hear.

He that hears *Truth* aright, that is, understands it well, must not stand out of, but in the *Truth* it self.

Therefore neither is it any wonder that all men do not understand and conceive those things that are brought forth by the *Light*. Those only that stand in it, are alone (and no other) capable thereof.

The case being thus, we see of how great concernment it is continually to exhort and excite men to turn in to the *Light* that is in them, that so they may go on to such a condition and measure therein, as to be fit to understand aright *the Word*, that is the *Truth of God*, because out of this there can be nothing understood and concluded from the words and writings given forth from the *Light*, but meer opinion & consequently errors. *This Light, Christ, &c. is the truth & word of God, as hath been already said, and in every way appears by what we have hitherto laid down: For this is a living Word, and transmiteth man from death to life, is powerful, & enableth a man to bear witness of it self every where.*

This is also the true Rule according unto which all our actions are to be squared.

This hath the pro-eminence before any Writing, Scripture, Doctrine, or anything else that we meet from without. *We are born into the world*, and brought up as every body knows. From the very first we hear differences, every one pretends that he knows the matter, and hath the truth: One holds forth on this, another that to us: *If now the Light which is in every man that comes into the world*, shall not be the judge, whither shall we go? To believe all is impossible, to reject all, no less: Who shall be Judge here? Who else can be but the *Light* within us? For whatsoever comes from without, is the thing to be judged of: Who then fitter? seeing this is infallible.

Again, Is not this (the *Light*) that by which we must see and know God, and so consequently that by which we must judge all things Divine? Certainly 'tis: then it follows also, That we can judge of no Doctrine, no Book that is Divine, but by this *Light* and judging it thereby to be Divine, it cannot but be truly so. As for example, If we experience that the Book called the BIBLE, in regard of the Divine Doctrine therein comprised, hath *such an harmony with that in which God is known*, that he must needs have been the Author of it, there cannot rationally any more powerful demonstration be demanded. With them that are thus, *the Scripture may become living and powerful, and not a dead letter*, as it must needs be to those men who have no feeling of this thing. And from hence then it's apparent, seeing *this Light* must stand before all things whatsoever that we meet with from without, that then *man must first of all be directed to this*, for without it what profit is there (I pray) to be reaped any where by any external sign but by it[?] Lay the Book of Scripture freely before any man, let him also have all the fitness (the Universities can give him) to look into in its proper Language in which it may have been first written, what will all be without *the Light*? Nothing. *The letters, the words are not the Scriptures*, but the mind alone is the Scripture, and this meaning can never be truly and justly hit, but by those alone that stand in the same *Light*, out of which the Scriptures proceeded.

These are they then to whom the Scripture is a *Co-witness* and as a seal of their being Sons of God: while by experience they find themselves, every one according to his measure, in the *same condition in which the Saints formerly were*, who spake & writ all those things comprehended in the Book of the Scripture, *these then have the true understanding and meaning of the Scriptures*, not those that *Imagine unto themselves a meaning* by opinion and guess, through a thousand

imaginations, without the least assurance of not erring: which becomes the very ground of all jangling [foolish empty talk] and contention.

In fine, and lastly. This Light in every man is the means to come to the knowledge of God. And seeing all external signes must needs presuppose this knowledge: therefore its self must needs be immediate, without my external sign: that signs must presuppose such a knowledge, is undeniable, for these signs must either be words or effects, works or miracles.

[If *Words*, we see at first an impossibility in the thing it self: for *Words are created and finite*, and God who should make known himself by them, *uncreated and infinite*: and therefore here is so infinite a difference, that there is no *manner* of agreement, nor any thing, in the [words] by which they might be capable to do it. But again, if you flye to the *meaning* of words, as being fit for such a thing, then that which we say will more manifestly appear: As put case for example sake, that GOD about to make known himself by words, should say, I AM GOD, and that this should he the sign by which he would make himself known, we see clearly, that it would be impossible for a man at first to know God by this: For if he comprehend anything out of the sence of the words, he must needs formerly have the signification of the word GOD, and what he is to understand by it: In like manner if God maketh his will known to man, the *knowledge of God* (which hath its original from the true *Light*) *must precede and convince him*, that that (Manifestation) can be from none but God alone, whereupon he's sufficiently assured.

If by *Effects*, (or *outward miraculous Works*) 'tis the same thing; for these are no less *created*, no less *terminated*: And though we might observe something in the nature of a thing, which might be too difficult for the power of any creature, which we know to effect: Yet this at the utmost would be a demonstration taken from our *impotency*, and not from *the nature and all operations of it*; and this kind of demonstration cannot be certain and stable, till we were able clearly and distinctly to see that there was *not a concurrency of many causes* to produce such an effect, but that it must needs have been caused by an *infinite and unlimited cause*, whom we call God: But who knoweth this? Or who can declare it?

Add to this, *That the knowledge of God in all things must first be, before the knowledge of any creature or particular thing*; so no particular thing without this, can be well known: and consequently is altogether incapable to come to know God by, or certainly to make known himself to man by.]

Go to then, *Without thy self*, O man, thou hast no means to look for, by which thou maist know God. *Thou must abide within thy self, to the Light that's in thee* thou must turn thee, there thou wilt find it, and no where else.

GOD is considered in Himself, *nearest unto thee and every man*. He that goes forth of himself to any Creature, thereby to know God, *departs from God*, and so much the further, as he comes more to mistake himself by it. This thou must *shun*, and the contrary *mind*, viz. *Mind the Light that's in thee*, by it to work, unmovably and faithfully to persevere.

God considered in himself, is nearest unto every man than himself, because he penetrates the most inward and intimate parts of man, and is the life of the inmost spirit, as the spirit is of the soul, & the soul of the body: Therefore is he worthy to be turned to, minded, sought, waited upon, and feared. Let all blind Leaders that say 'tis not God that appeareth in the hearts of the wicked, hear this; and all fools that say, In their heart there is no God.