

# ILLUMINATION

## ILLUMINATION

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### Definition

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- The Holy Spirit's ministry of helping believers to understand and apply the truths of the Word of God
- It is that operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He makes known to regenerate men the spiritual content, significance, application, and truth of the Bible
- Since only God knows the things of God, it is essential that the Spirit of God instructs the believer
- Illumination is different than revelation and inspiration.
  - Revelation relates to its content or material
  - Inspiration to the method of recording that material
  - Illumination to the meaning of the record for all believers.

*Luke 24:44-45 ~ "Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures"*

- Illumination does not refer to the communication of objective and literary content/facts; that is available to all men with the proper training and mental faculties
- Apart from the special ministry of the Spirit in bringing unregenerate men to Christ, the illumination of the text is a ministry of the Spirit which is limited to the believer
- Therefore, God's revelation must be understood through study, but it is the special work of the Holy Spirit to convict people so that they see the relationship between the text and themselves, and believe and act accordingly

### The Need for Illumination

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- It enables man to comprehend the Word of God. Without it we cannot truly do so because:
  1. The differences between God and man prevent us from entirely comprehending him
    - God goes beyond our categories of understanding and can never be fully grasped within our finite concepts or by our human mind
    - Correlated with God's transcendence is man's finiteness
    - Man cannot formulate concepts which are consistent with the nature of God

*Job 5:9 ~ Who does great and unsearchable things, Wonders without number.*

*Job 11:7-9 ~ Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? "They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than <sup>b</sup>Sheol, what can you know? "Its measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea.*

*Job 21:22 ~ Can anyone teach God knowledge, In that He judges those on high?*

*Job 38-42*

**Isaiah 40:13-14** ~ *Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding?*

**Romans 11:33-34** ~ *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?*

**Colossians 2:3** ~ *Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*

2. Because the Bible is God-breathed and therefore in an entirely different dimension from any other literature, it is necessary that man receives God-given help in understanding it

**2 Timothy 3:16** ~ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*

**Hebrews 4:12** ~ *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

3. Unregenerate man's sin-darkened mind cannot comprehend and apply spiritual truths

**Romans 1:21** ~ *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

**Ephesians 2:1-3** ~ *And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

**Ephesians 4:18** ~ *being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;*

**2 Corinthians 4:4** ~ *in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

## **Biblical Evidence for Illumination**

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- The primary passage addressing the issue of illumination is 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

### **Vs. 6-8**

- The “mature” = not those who are more advanced in their faith but those who are saved – i.e. those who are redeemed and completely trusting in Christ
- True believers are the only ones among whom the gospel can be wisdom
- This wisdom, previously a “mystery,” has been prepared by God in eternity past – this refers to nothing other than salvation through His Son
- But those who are of the world do not receive this wisdom because it is not humanly discovered
- This is evident from the fact that they crucified Christ (vs. 8)

### **Vs. 9**

- This verse is not referring to the wonders of heaven as many assume it is but rather to the wisdom God has prepared for believers

- His point is that the natural eyes, ears, and hearts of men cannot know or comprehend His wisdom
- It is prepared only for those who love Him
- Natural man cannot discern divine truth through their natural senses such as seeing and hearing
- This mystery is now revealed and the only way they could know this was by the Spirit who knows and reveals these deep things of God about salvation.
- True wisdom is divinely revealed
  - In Revelation – vs. 10-11
  - In Inspiration – vs. 12-13
  - In Illumination – vs. 14-16

#### **Vs. 10-11 (in Revelation)**

- The HS is the Trinity’s agent of transmission and communication – He knows the mind of God perfectly
- Paul illustrates this by pointing out that nobody can fully fathom the thoughts of anyone else – our innermost thoughts are known only to ourselves
- In a similar way, only God’s own Spirit can know Him intimately
- It is the HS, who knows the depths and thoughts of God, whom God has sent to reveal His own wisdom to those who believe

#### **Vs. 12-13 (In Inspiration)**

- God’s truth cannot be discovered by man; it can only be received...the Bible is the Spirit’s vehicle for bringing God’s revelation
- The “we” and “us” of these verses do not refer to Christians in general but to Paul himself
- God’s Word is for all believers but was revealed only to the apostles and other writers of Scripture
- Only those men can be said to be inspired
- The promise of John 14:26 is for the benefit of all believers, but was given only to the apostles: John 14:26 ~ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.
- The apostles recorded what God gave them

#### **Vs. 14-16 (In Illumination)**

- Since only spiritual people are able to receive spiritual truths, it follows that the man without the Spirit, an unregenerate person, would not and could not receive the message of wisdom regardless of his intellectual abilities.
- In fact, it is all foolishness to him for he cannot understand them because they are not known to him
- It is possible to read the Bible and yet not understand it (i.e. Pharisees)
- The natural man CANNOT know or understand the things of the Spirit of God – his problem is not an intellectual problem but a spiritual one
- Luther: “The Bible cannot be understood simply by study or talent; you must count only on the influence of the Holy Spirit”
- Calvin: “The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For...these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit”
- God’s truth is truly only available to those with a regenerate spirit in whom His Spirit dwells, for only the Spirit can illumine Scripture
- But when the HS changes a man’s heart, he is able to “see” with the eyes of His heart
- The believer now has a resident truth teacher to enlighten him about all the things of God he needs to know

- This is what it means: “But he who is spiritual appraises all things”
- The man possessing the Spirit is guided by Him and able to evaluate and apply all things the Spirit reveals since he has the mind of Christ and therefore able to respond in obedience.
- Unlike God’s revelation and inspiration which were given to the biblical writers, His illumination is for all Christians
- The Holy Spirit takes God’s Word and illuminates it for those in whom He dwells
- This is what John referred to in 1 John 2:27 ~ As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

## Questions Regarding Illumination

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1. To what degree can non-Christians understand the Scriptures?
  - Non-believers can understand the actual content of Scripture. In fact, one of the best commentaries on Genesis was written by an unbeliever (Umberto Kasuto)
  - Since unbelievers do not possess the ministry of the Holy Spirit, they may achieve a high level of understanding of the Bible, but what they know they basically consider foolishness (1 Cor. 2:14)
  - Illumination is not concerned with merely understanding facts but with using those facts to promote Christlikeness
  - Unbelievers are unable to and do not desire to apply the true facts of Scripture to their lives

2. Can a believer know all there is to know about God and His Word?
  - Certain things are not knowable

*Deuteronomy 29:29 ~ The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

- Even things that are knowable we still spend our whole life learning. We never reach a point of knowing all there is to know about God
- We do not have exhaustive knowledge of everything in Holy Scripture

*2 Peter 3:15-16 ~ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

3. Does this mean believers have no responsibility to study?

*Ezra 7:10 ~ For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

*Acts 18:24 ~ Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.*

*2 Timothy 2:15 ~ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*