GROVE BIBLE

ILLUMINATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

BIBLIOLOGY PAPER





Illumination of The Scriptures

Illumination

The Doctrine of Illumination teaches that God, The Spirit, gives believers understanding of His Word, that leads to obedience. The Holy Spirit shines the light of saving comprehension in the minds and hearts of His people and gives them ears to hear (Matt. 13:43, Luke 8:8) the Bible for what it really is, The Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

Believers are anointed by The Spirit and taught by Him (1 John 2:20,27). He is The Spirit of truth and He grants understanding which leads to convictional interpretation and obedience (John 14:15-17). The Psalmist recognized and prayed that God would, "Open [his] eyes, that [he might] behold wondrous things out of [God's] law" (Psalm 119:18). God opened Lydia's heart to believe (Acts 16:14) and He alone can enlighten the eyes of His people's hearts (Eph. 1:18).

The Word of God is clear, but it is foolishness to those whom The Spirit doesn't give the understanding (1 Cor. 2:14). As James Buchanan put it, "A man who sees, but has no sense of beauty, or of a man who hears, but has no sense of harmony; just such is the case of a natural man, who sees the truth without perceiving its spiritual excellence, and on whose ear the sound of the Gospel falls without awakening music in his soul." John MacArthur said, "Just as the physically blind cannot see the sun, the spiritually blind cannot see the Son. Both lack proper illumination." The same God who spoke light into existence (Gen. 1:3) must speak to the darkness of the spiritually dead heart and bring forth the light of His glory in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Even though all people are spiritually blinded by the enemy (2 Cor. 4:4) God removes the veil of blindness from believers by the power of His Spirit, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Spirit teaches His people all things of saving consequence and brings to remembrance the words of Christ (John 14:26).



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What Illumination is Not

The fact that The Spirit illuminates the Scriptures does not mean that diligent study is unnecessary (2 Tim. 2:15) or that there are no mysterious elements in the Word (Deut. 29:29). Illumination does not negate the need for Bible teachers (Eph. 4:11-12), or discipline in training (1 Tim. 4:8), nor does it mean that we can't misinterpret the Truth (2 Peter 3:16). As Richard Baxter stated, "It is not the work of the Spirit to tell you the meaning of Scripture, and give you the knowledge of divinity, without your own study and labour, but to bless that study, and give you knowledge thereby… To reject study on pretense of the sufficiency of the Spirit, is to reject the Scripture itself." Understanding the Scriptures ascends higher than mere cognitive reason, "The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to His own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit" (John Calvin). Illumination does not bypass the intellect though, the Bible is not a magical book filled with incantations. Illumination is not less than mental understanding, but more than cerebral facts alone, so, "No man has a right to say, as some are in the habit of saying, “The Spirit tells me that such or such is the meaning of a passage.” How is he assured that it is the Holy Spirit, and not a spirit of delusion, except from the evidence that the interpretation is the legitimate meaning of the words? (Alexander Carson) (Acts 17:11). Or as Martin Luther put it, "The Bible cannot be understood simply by study or talent; you must count only on the influence of the Holy Spirit." God brings light to our darkness and grants understanding of His ways, "For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness." (Psalm 18:28). "God must teach us to know the mysteries of the Gospel after a spiritual manner. A man may see the figures upon a dial, but he cannot tell how the day goes unless the sun shines; so we may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them savingly, till God by His Spirit shines upon our soul… He not only informs our mind, but inclines our will" (Thomas Watson).