

REVELATION



INSPIRATION



ANIMATION



COLLECTION



TRANSLATION



ILLUMINATION

1

INTERPRETATION



APPLICATION



COMMUNICATION

THE WRITTEN WORD

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, October 13, 2009

“He Opened Their Understanding . . .”

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The canon of Scripture is complete. We now have an utterly sufficient, written revelation from God. But even though we have it in our possession in a language we speak, the Scriptures would still be a closed book to us--and its revelation to us unfruitful--if we were left to our own human resources to understand and apply it.

Gratefully, we are not left to our own resources. The same God who has providentially given us His word has also blessed us with the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit’s work of “illumination”--that is, “the Holy Spirit’s enabling of Christians generally to understand, to recall to mind, and to apply the Scriptures they have studied.”¹

I. THE NEED FOR THE ILLUMINATING WORK FROM GOD.

- A. There is a sense in which unregenerate persons can know something of Scriptural truth--but only the sense that a blind man might be able to know something of the concepts and terminologies of “color”. The knowledge an unbeliever may have of Scripture through their own resources will not be experiential, life-transforming, or saving (see Matthew 13:13-15).
- B. This is because the unregenerate person is fundamentally “blind” to spiritual truth:
 1. The natural man is limited in grasping scriptural truth because such truth is, by nature, “spiritual” (John 6:63). It cannot therefore rightly be understood through the “fleshly” efforts of study and reflection (1 Corinthians 2:6-3:2).
 2. Furthermore, the ability of the unregenerate men and women to grasp spiritual truth is limited by their own personal fallenness in sin:
 - a. Their fallenness has set them in a hostile state of mind against spiritual truth (John 3:18-21).
 - b. The enemy of their souls also blinds them to the truth of God’s word (2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Matthew 13:19).
 3. There is even a special blindness that God has imposed on Israel for a time, in order to advance His redemptive purposes toward the Gentiles (Romans 11:25-32; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15).
- C. There is, therefore, a fundamental need for a work of grace in a person’s life before he or she can know the things of God accurately from the Scriptures. He or she must be regenerated (“born-again”) and be aided by God before they can know the things which the Scriptures reveal that He has prepared for those who love Him (John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

II. THE ILLUMINATING MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

- A. During the time of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus performed the work of “illuminating” spiritual truth His disciples (Mark 4:33-34). He even performed this work for them when He appeared to them after His resurrection (Luke 24:25-27, 32, 45-48).

- B. But even during His earthly ministry to them, He let them know that He would soon be leaving them. And He taught them that after He had returned to the Father, it would be the work of the Holy Spirit--whom He would send to minister to them in His place (see John 14:15-18)--to illumine spiritual truth to His people.
1. The Spirit would perform this work first toward the apostles. Their own fleshly powers were not enough for them to retain and accurately pass-on the three-and-a-half years of instruction they had received from the Lord Jesus. The Spirit would come to them and help them to remember all that the Lord had taught them (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15). As a result, the Lord Jesus could say that the Holy Spirit would testify to the world of Himself through them (John 15:26-27).
 2. The same divine Person who guided the understanding of the apostles now guides the Church today in understanding the spiritual truth the apostles passed on to us. All genuine, regenerated believers in Christ are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 John 3:24); and He continues to guide the believer in the spiritual truth that He has preserved for us in Scripture (1 John 2:26-27).

III. THE PART WE PLAY IN THE SPIRIT'S ILLUMINATING MINISTRY.

- A. He illuminates scriptural truth to those of us who have entered into a saving relationship with Christ by faith (1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:16).
- B. He illuminates scriptural truth to believers who have an attitude of dependent prayer upon His ministry (Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21).
- C. He illuminates scriptural truth through our faithful attention to the ministries of those He has gifted to serve as preachers and teachers in His church--which even includes their written and recorded ministries in history past (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
- D. He illuminates scriptural truth through our own faithfulness and discipline in personally reading, memorizing and studying Scripture (Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15).
- E. He illuminates further scriptural truth to us in a progressive and practical way--that is, through our growth in a lifestyle of personal holiness and obedience to the truth He has already given us and illuminated to us (Hebrews 5:12-14; James 1:21-25).

¹Robert Raymond, cited in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zonderan Publishing Co., 1994, 2000), p. 1042