

Bethany Bible Church; AM Bible Study; May 16, 2018  
The Holy Spirit—Our Helper; Lesson 28; His Helping

# THE SPIRIT'S HELP IN THE STUDY OF THE WORD

Theme: The Holy Spirit fulfills a necessary 'illuminating' ministry in believers—helping them to understand scriptural truth.

Recently, we've been exploring some of the various ways that the Holy Spirit serves as our divine "Helper". Particularly, we've been considering some of His works that don't fit into any of the larger categories in a traditional study of the doctrine of the Spirit. And in this lesson, we take up the subject of the Spirit's ministry of guiding the saints in their study of revealed truth through Scripture. This is sometimes referred too as the 'illuminating' ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's a ministry that is expressed to us in 1 John 2:27;

*But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1 John 2:27).<sup>1</sup>*

Even though the sixty-six books of the Bible give us an utterly sufficient written revelation from God, the Bible would still be a closed book to us—and the revelation it provides unfruitful in our lives—if it were left strictly only to our human resources to understand and apply what they say. But gratefully, the same God who has providentially given His word to us has also given His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and to perform His ministry of illuminating the Scriptures to us. As the reformed theologian Robert Raymond has put it, this ministry speaks of "the Holy Spirit's enabling of Christians generally to understand, to recall to mind, and to apply the Scriptures they have studied."<sup>2</sup> In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith;

*The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word ...*

How grateful we should be for this very necessary ministry of the Spirit on our behalf!

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Now; let's first ask:

## **I. WHY IS THE SPIRIT'S ILLUMINATING MINISTRY NECESSARY?**

A. There is, of course, a sense in which unsaved people can know something of scriptural truth. But their understanding is limited and qualified—something like the way that a

blind man might be able to know some of the concepts and terminologies of the science of “color”; but not really know those colors accurately and experientially. The knowledge that an unbeliever may have of Scripture through the use of their own human resources will not be experiential, life-transforming, or saving. This is because the unregenerate person is spiritually incapable of grasping scriptural truth. Such truth is, by nature, spiritual; and therefore can only be “spiritually discerned”. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14;

*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).*

And not only is there an inability on the part of fallen human beings to understand and apply God’s word rightly, but the enemy of our souls also himself labors to keep spiritual truth from unbelievers. As Paul further wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4;

*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).*

- B. There is, therefore, a fundamental need for a work of God’s grace in someone before she or he can know the things of God accurately that are revealed in the Scriptures. Someone must be “born-again”, and then be aided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, before they can know truthfully the things which the Scriptures reveal to them, and to understand something of the things God gives to them as His children. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10;

*But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).*

As Paul affirms in 2 Corinthians 3:14 (in words that he applied to the Jewish people specifically; but that are equally applicable to all people), “... the veil is taken away in Christ.”

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So that’s why this ministry is necessary. Now, let’s consider another question:

## **II. HOW DOES THE SPIRIT FULFILL THIS MINISTRY TOWARD US?**

- A. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus personally “illuminated” spiritual truth to His disciples—just as a normal part of His ongoing teaching ministry to them. In Mark 4:33-34, we read,

*And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples (Mark 4:33-34).*

There were times when He even performed this personal ministry to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. When He met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and listened to how confused they were over the events that occurred regarding His crucifixion, He told them;

*“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:25-27).*

After He departed from them, they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (v. 32). Later on, He met with His gathered apostles and “He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (v. 45).

- B. Jesus’ earthly ministry, then, has set a precedent. The disciples could not understand spiritual truth from the Scriptures apart from the enabling help of the Lord as He was present with them. But even during His earthly ministry to them, He let His disciples know that He would soon be leaving them; and 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 Scriptural truth to them. The fleshly powers and remarkable training of even the Lord’s own hand-picked apostles—who had just spent three-and-a-half years being taught personally by Him while in His bodily presence—would still not be enough for them to retain and reliably pass-on all the instructions they had received from Jesus. But the Spirit would come to them and help them to remember all that the Lord had taught them. In John 14:25-26, He told the apostles,

*“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 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 things that I said to you” (John 14:25-26).*

And in John 16:12-15, He further told them,

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:12-15).*

As a result, they would be enabled to remember, comprehend and accurately communicate to us what Jesus taught them (see John 15:26-27).

- C. Now; all of that was a promise that the Lord made specifically to the apostles—the foundational witnesses of Christ to the church. But the same divine Person who guided the understanding of those apostles now ministers to the believers that He indwells. The Holy Spirit that Jesus sent to us enables us to understand that same spiritual truth that those Spirit-enabled apostles passed on to us. We can count on this as being true because, as the Scriptures promise, all of us who are genuine, regenerated believers in Christ are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit who led those apostles (see Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 John 3:24). We all who are in Christ enjoy—right now—the wonderful benefit of this resident Teacher and Guide in all the spiritual truth that He has preserved for us in Scripture. Regarding that truth, the apostle John wrote,

*Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us--eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1 John 2:26-27).*

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Now; the fact that the Holy Spirit illuminates our understanding of the Scriptures does not mean that we are merely passive recipients. We do not just sit around and wait for ‘understanding’ to be poured into our heads from above or to spring up unexpectedly from within. Rather, we are instructed to have an active part in the work of His ministry of illumination.

That leads us to a final question:

### **III. HOW DO WE COOPERATE WITH THE SPIRIT IN THIS MINISTRY?**

- A. We must make absolutely sure that we have entered into a saving relationship with Christ by faith. The Bible is very clear on this. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16;

*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).*

We absolutely cannot have ‘the mind of Christ’ apart from a relationship by faith with Christ Himself. A spiritual veil covers over the understanding of the unredeemed woman or man; but as Paul affirmed to us in 2 Corinthians 3:16, that veil is taken away in Christ. And so, we must be ‘in Christ’ by faith. We must be ‘born-again’.

- B. Then, as redeemed people, we must cultivate an attitude of humble and sincerely dependent prayer with regard to the Holy Spirit's illuminating ministry. Paul said that he prayed regularly for the Ephesian believers;

*... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe (Ephesians 1:17-19).*

Similarly, he told them later in his letter;

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:15-19).*

We cannot know these things apart from dependency upon the Holy Spirit; and such dependency is expressed through a habit of prayer.

- C. We also must give faithful attention to the ministries of those that the Holy Spirit has gifted to serve as preachers and teachers in His church—which would even include their written and preserved ministries in history past, through their books and recorded sermons and theological works. As we have already seen in our study of some of the key passages about the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit, He has given some to be 'teachers' (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 4:10-11); and these gifted individuals are intended by Him for "the equipping of the saints".
- D. In addition, we must be faithful and disciplined in personally reading, studying and memorizing Scripture. We must, ourselves, do the hard work of study; and there's really no way around it, it's only diligent, hard work that renders fruit in God's word. Paul told the Colossians believers;

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16).*

Similarly, he told Pastor Timothy;

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).*

- E. And finally, if we want to rightly cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s illuminating ministry, we must make it our habit to grow in a lifestyle of personal holiness and obedience to the truth He has already given us and has already illuminated to us. He gives us truth that is meant to be put into action in our lives. The writer of Hebrews once gently rebuked his readers because he could not pass on greater truth to them that he would have liked to; and he told them;

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).*

We grow in our maturity in the ‘solid food’ of the word “by reason of use”. As Pastor James memorably put it;

*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:21-25).*

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May we grow to thank and trust this wonderful, resident Helper in our daily interaction with the word of truth. May we learn to depend upon Him for His help—asking for it in prayer on every occasion that we pick up our Bible or hear it being taught. And with His help, may we grow increasingly to put His ministry to use by carefully applying to our lives what He gives us from the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Raymond, cited in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zonderan Publishing Co., 1994, 2000), p. 1042.

<sup>3</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith, I.VI.*