DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Illumination of the Spirit

Lesson 10

In this lesson we will study the Holy Spirit's role in helping believers understand the meaning of the Word of God which is often referred to as "the illumination of the Spirit." We will learn what illumination is, why it is important, and how it applies to every believer.

I. DEFINITION OF ILLUMINATION

A. *The Holy Spirit:* "[An] important contribution of the reformation was the doctrine of illumination – the Holy Spirit revealing the teaching of the Word of God. In contrast to the Roman conception that only the priests could interpret the Word, the Reformers openly advocated reading the Bible, affirming that all believers could be taught the Word of God by the Holy Spirit directly."[1]

B. *The Moody Handbook of Theology:* "Even while applying proper hermeneutics and methodology, there is a divine element to understanding God's truth. The believer is aided by the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination in guiding the believer to an understanding of divine truth (1 Cor. 2:11-13)."[2]

C. Illumination is the Spirit's work in the mind of a believer to reveal the truth of God. It is a spiritual resurrection from the dead whereby we are given life to understand the things God has for us in His Word. It is as if the Holy Spirit turns on a supernatural light in our hearts to reveal the treasures of divine revelation. But the unbeliever does not experience the illuminating gift of the Spirit. He is spiritually dead. His mind is in a dark cloud, and he may see some of the faint images of the Word of God, but he can never understand or experience them like a Christian.

II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT ILLUMINATION

A. *All About the Holy Spirit:* "Without a doubt there are many things, even about the Bible, one can know apart from the revelation of the Spirit, but for deep insight into the secrets of God, we are entirely dependent upon the divine Revealer. As it has been expressed, "The horse and his rider may see the same magnificent piece of statuary in the park; the one may be delighted with it as a work of human genius, but upon the dull eye of the other it makes no impression, and for the reason that it takes a human mind to appreciate the work of the human mind. Likewise only the Spirit of God can know and make known the thoughts and teachings and revelations of God."[3]

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[1] John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pg. 247.

[2] Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989), 150.

[3] Herbert Lockyer, *All About the Holy Spirit*, pg. 206.

B. Normally, when discussing illumination, it is often stated that illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. Yet there seems to be one exception. The elect, before coming to faith in Christ, must first understand the gospel in order to believe. In order to understand the gospel they need the Holy Spirit's assistance in illuminating the truth. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the elect are illuminated before being saved. Some have tried to deal with this problem by stating that people are first "regenerated" by the Holy Spirit and then believe and are saved. Yet this solution, though it may solve the first problem, creates a second problem. The Bible does not teach there are "regenerated unbelievers." Regeneration is a synonym for salvation in that it occurs at salvation. Therefore, we may conclude that in the case of the elect, the Holy Spirit first illumines them so that they can understand the gospel, believe and be saved. The theological category where this problem is usually discussed is called the "*ordo salutis*" which is Latin for "the order of salvation." In discussing the *ordo salutis* one discusses the order of events leading to a person's salvation.

III. SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF ILLUMINATION

A. **Isa. 54:13** "All your sons will be taught of the Lord; And the well-being of your sons will be great.

B. **Matt. 11:25-27** At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

C. **Matt. 13:10-17** And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 15 For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.' 16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 "For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

D. **John 8:43** "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.

E. **John 14:26** (also Luke 12:12)[4] "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.

F. **John 16:13**[5] "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

G. **Acts 16:14** A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

H. **I Cor. 2:11-14** For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

I. **I Jn. 2:20, 27** (cf. II Cor. 1:21-22) But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. . . 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.

J. **I Jn. 5:20** And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

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[4]It must be noted that Jesus is speaking to the disciples in this text, primarily about receiving direct revelation from God after Christ's death. But there is a principle here that applies to all believers. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth and does teach us all things.

[5]It must be noted that Jesus is speaking to the disciples in this text, primarily about receiving direct revelation from God after Christ's death. But there is a principle here that applies to all believers. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth and does guide us into all truth.

IV. ERRORS CONCERNING ILLUMINATION

A. Error – *The Moody Handbook of Theology:* "The illumination view suggests that some Christians may have spiritual insight that although similar to other Christians is greater in degree. In this view any devout Christian, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, can be the author of inspired Scripture. Adherents to this view suggest it is not the writings that are inspired, rather it is the writers who are inspired. Schleiermacher taught this view on the Continent while Coleridge propounded it in England."[6]

B. Error – Illumination is the same as inspiration.

C. Error – Illumination when given in an extraordinary degree becomes inspiration.

D. Error – Illumination is the same as receiving divine revelation.

E. Error – Because of illumination we don't need teachers and preachers in the church. After all, **I Jn. 2:27** says, "*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*."

F. Error – Illumination means that we don't need to have any set rules for interpreting the Bible.

G. Error – Because the Holy Spirit illumines us to the truth, we don't need to study the Scriptures.

H. Error – Some Christians are illumined by the Holy Spirit to understand the Scriptures to a greater degree, or with more certainty, or in special ways that other Christians cannot. "The Pope is given final authority to interpret the Scriptures."

V. APPLICATION OF ILLUMINATION

A. A. W. Pink answers the question, "How do we know if we have been taught by the Holy Spirit?" He says illumination is:

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[6]Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989), 161.

1. *"A spiritual knowledge which the teaching of the Holy Spirit imparts is an operative knowledge."*

2. *"Knowledge that the Holy Spirit imparts is a soul humbling knowledge."*

3. *"Knowledge which the Holy Spirit imparts is world despising knowledge."*

4. *"The knowledge which the teaching of the Spirit imparts is a transforming knowledge."*[7]

B. We should be thankful that God has given us supernatural help in understanding His Word. Illumination is not something that we need to apply as much as it is something that we need to know and be thankful for. It is a work of the Spirit to illumine us to the truth.

C. We must remember to pray and ask for the Spirit's help when reading, meditating on and studying the Bible.

D. We must be careful not to let unbelievers instruct us in the meaning and application of the Word of God for they are spiritually dead and cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God (**I Cor. 2:14**).

Thou divine Spirit,
illuminate to me the words of the Lord.
Show me the wealth of glory
that lies beneath the old familiar stories.
Teach me the depth of meaning hid in the songs of Zion.
Raise me to the height of aspiration
that is compassed by the wings of the prophet.
Lift me up to the summit of faith
that is trod by the feet of the apostle . . . .
I shall find treasures in my earthen vessels
when Thou hast made known the words of the Lord.[8]
"You may listen to the preacher,
God's own truth be clearly shown;
but you need a greater Teacher,
From the everlasting throne:
Application is the word of God alone."[9]

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[7]A. W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, pgs. 98-99.

[8]George Matheson as quoted by Herbert Lockyer in, *All About the Holy Spirit,* pg. 206.

[9]A. W. Pink, *The Holy spirit,* pg. 100.