

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
May 24, 2015
“The Illumination of the Holy Spirit”

Memory Verse:

“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” 1 Cor. 2:14

The Illumination of the Holy Spirit

The common description for the work that the Holy Spirit does to help us understand and interpret scripture is called “illumination.” This is the same word we might use for using a lantern to light up a dark room. This doesn’t mean that we’re just dumb and the Holy Spirit comes and magically makes us smart. Just because a room is dark doesn’t mean there’s nothing there to be seen. A room is dark because the one who is trying to see has no light to see by. To a blind man, all rooms are dark because his eyes can’t process ANY light. When we study God’s Word under submission to the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t make dumb men smart... He makes Blind men SEE! The Truth was there the whole time, and God fixes our eyes where we can see it. However, just because the Holy Spirit makes it POSSIBLE for us to see and understand God’s truth from the Bible, doesn’t mean that we always use it.

A quote from Grant Osborne in Robert Plummer’s book (40 questions...) says:

“The Spirit does not whisper to us special reasons which are not otherwise available; rather, he opens our eyes to acknowledge those reasons which are available.” In other words, the Spirit makes it possible for the reader to use every faculty to discern the Word and apply it. How does this explain the fact that equally spiritual scholars interpret the same passage quite differently? The Spirit makes it possible to overcome our preunderstanding in order to discern the Word, but he does not guarantee that we will do so. On difficult passages we must use every tool we can muster and still will often read a text the way our experience and theological proclivities dictate...”

That’s a long quote, but did you catch what he said? Even with the Spirit standing by, supernaturally and graciously pulling back the veil of our sinful, flawed minds and letting the truth of God’s Word in, we will most often try to color or influence that Truth with whatever we already believe, or what we want it to say! Ever wonder why some churches split and grown men and women, Christians I mean, won’t fellowship with each other because they read the same scripture but have two different interpretations? HINT: It’s not because the Holy Spirit told them both something different and wants them to slug it out. It’s because we let our traditions and our pride and our preferences take authority over the real meaning of scripture... or if the scripture seems ambiguous, we just go ahead and say it means what we think it says without being humble enough to say “I don’t know” or “I’m not certain.” If your strongest argument is “Well, I think...” or “Well, my Pawpaw Bradshaw always said...” then you’re not giving the authority to God OR His Word.

That quote goes on to say:

“Some passages are so ambiguous that more than one interpretation is possible. We must make our hermeneutical choice,” (hermeneutics just means our chosen method of interpretation) “but remain open to further leading from the Spirit and challenge from our peers. The Spirit enables us to free our minds to the text but does not whisper to us the correct answer.”

While we should each “be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5) about whatever conclusion we arrive at and how it affects our walk with God, we should never abandon humility and love when we deal others who may have concluded otherwise. Remember, we’re talking about things that aren’t readily apparent. Remember: we’re not talking about the simple, undeniable truths of the Word like Jesus’ divinity, his death, burial and resurrection, God’s Love: the Gospel that unites us and drives us. We’re not to compromise those foundational truths.

Now you may think this is all well and good, but how do we know all this “illumination” talk isn’t just something someone dreamed up. Theologians can help us learn to think clearly and sharply about the Bible and train us to study and retain it better and to more wisely consider it, but without a biblical foundation, theologians might as well be your average teacher. Thankfully, there is plenty of biblical evidence to support the doctrine of illumination. Here are a few:

Psalm 119:17-20

*Be good to your servant while I live, that I may obey your word.
Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.
I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.
My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.*

***The authors of the psalms pray repeatedly for divine assistance in understanding and applying God’s Word.

Matthew 13:11-16

¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴ *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’*

¹⁶ *But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.*

***Jesus differentiates between his followers and those outside. His followers are able to truly see, hear and understand Jesus’ teaching because it has been “given” to them by God.

1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁴ *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.*

***Here we see that the person who without the Spirit is blind to revelations from God through His Word because God's Truth is only discerned "through the Spirit!"

2 Corinthians 3:13-16

¹³ *We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

***Here Paul is talking about nonbelieving Jews as having dull minds and veiled hearts. This is not because they are stupid, but because they are hardened against seeing that the Scriptures point to Jesus as the Messiah (see also Rom. 11:7-8). However, if and when "anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" and we believe it is the Holy Spirit, the revealer of truth, that takes the veil away.

Luke 24:44-45 (also John 20:22)

⁴⁴ *He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

(also John 20:22, ²² *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*)

***Finally, these two parallel scriptures describe the same resurrection appearance of Jesus but give two vantage points. Luke describes Jesus as "opening the disciples' minds" while John describes it as the reception of the Holy Spirit! Only by the Spirit's aid can we rightly perceive Christ as the ultimate meaning of the Bible.