

Biblical Doctrine of Illumination

The Biblical Doctrine of Illumination and Its Role in Understanding Scripture: The subject of *illumination* is one that generates numerous questions, yet remains largely misunderstood. This doctrine has the potential to divide both friendships and families, making it a topic of significant importance. The doctrine I'm referring to is the biblical doctrine of illumination. I will delve into its meaning by distinguishing it from two related doctrines: *inspiration and revelation*.

Inspiration

Inspiration is the process through which God directly breathed His words into the human authors of Scripture. These men wrote not from their own understanding or thoughts, but under divine guidance, ensuring that their writings were the very words of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The word *inspiration* here is from the Greek *theopneustos*, meaning "God-breathed." Thus, God exhaled His words to the authors of Scripture, and they wrote them down. This understanding of inspiration also carries assurance. In 2 Peter 1, the apostle writes:

2 Peter 1:20-21:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

These men did not act on their own will, but under the direct influence of God, delivering His inspired word.

When discussing inspiration, there is an important distinction between preaching God's Word and preaching opinions. As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 2:13:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

The words of the apostles were recognized as the very words of God, not human opinions or beliefs. This forms the foundation of biblical authority—the assurance that what we have is indeed God's Word.

Revelation

Revelation, on the other hand, refers to the act of God revealing truth that was previously unknown to humanity. Through revelation, God made known His will and character, particularly in events such as the creation, the flood, and the lives of the patriarchs. For example, although Moses was not present during these early events, he was able to write about them because God revealed these truths to him.

The Bible is clear that God's ultimate and final revelation came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:18:

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

The culmination of revelation is seen in Christ's life and ministry, as well as in the completion of the written Scriptures. The book of Hebrews further explains that, although God spoke in various ways in the past, His final word came through His Son:

Hebrews 1:1-2:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

This final revelation through Christ and the completion of Scripture signals that no new revelation is being given today. Claims of new visions or prophecies contradict the understanding that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God.

Illumination

The third term is *illumination*, and this is where many people get confused. Illumination refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, guiding and enlightening believers to understand the truth that has already been revealed. Christians often say, "God revealed something to me," but in fact, God is illuminating their minds to understand what has already been revealed in Scripture.

John 14:16-17:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the

Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 16:13:

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

The Holy Spirit's ministry is not to bring attention to Himself but to glorify Christ by helping believers understand the truths of the gospel. He teaches us the truth already revealed in the Scriptures and helps us apply it to our lives.

The doctrine of illumination explains why some people grasp spiritual truths more readily than others. In Acts, we read about Lydia, whose "heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

Acts 16:14:

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Without the Holy Spirit opening her heart, Lydia would not have understood the message Paul preached.

A similar instance occurs after Christ's resurrection when He opened the understanding of His disciples:

Luke 24:44-45:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be

fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

Even the disciples, who had spent years with Jesus, needed their minds illuminated to fully comprehend the Scriptures.

Additional References on Illumination

To further understand the doctrine of illumination, it is helpful to look at several other scriptural references that emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing truth to believers.

1 Corinthians 2:10-12:

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

This passage shows that the Spirit plays a critical role in helping believers understand the deeper truths of God, which would be inaccessible without His work of illumination.

Ephesians 1:17-18:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his

calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

Paul prays that believers receive the “spirit of wisdom and revelation,” which helps them to know God more fully and to have their understanding enlightened. This prayer highlights the dependence believers have on the Holy Spirit for illumination.

Psalm 119:18:

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

The psalmist’s prayer underscores the need for divine intervention to perceive the wonders contained in God’s Word. Illumination is necessary for understanding and applying Scripture.

John 14:26:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The Holy Spirit, as the Comforter, not only teaches but also brings to remembrance the teachings of Christ, which is part of the ongoing work of illumination in the believer’s life.

The Biblical Doctrine of Illumination and Its Role in Understanding Scripture: Building upon these themes introduced, we continue to explore the biblical doctrine of illumination, focusing on the stages of Christian growth and how God uses different means to reveal truth. This process of spiritual maturation plays a significant role in how

individuals come to understand and apply biblical principles.

In our Christian walk, we experience different stages of growth. Just as a child cannot handle solid food until they are ready, so believers are not given spiritual meat until they are prepared for it. The Bible often refers to these stages, emphasizing that some truths require spiritual maturity before they can be fully grasped. This is reflected in how God reveals truth as we are able to receive it.

Proverbs 2:6:

For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

God is sovereign in how He gives understanding, and it comes directly from Him. However, He also uses specific means to achieve this purpose, such as diligent study and meditation. This principle is reinforced in Paul's letter to Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:7:

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

Here, Paul urges Timothy to engage his mind actively ("consider what I say"), showing that understanding does not come passively or automatically. The Greek word for "consider" (*noiéo*) means to engage the mind in careful thought, highlighting that God's illumination often works through our active pursuit of knowledge.

God uses our efforts—such as study, prayer, and meditation—to reveal His truth. The more we engage with His Word, the more we are able to receive deeper truths. This principle is clear in Jesus' teaching about truth being revealed in proportion to one's readiness to hear.

Mark 4:33:

And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.

Jesus taught His disciples and the crowds according to their ability to receive and comprehend the truth. God does not overwhelm us with more truth than we can handle at any given time, illustrating His wisdom in how He reveals His Word to us. Moreover, Paul again reinforces the necessity of study as a means to understanding.

2 Timothy 2:15:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Those who dedicate themselves to study are more likely to grasp deeper spiritual truths, as God rewards effort and dedication. This highlights that illumination is not a random or automatic process, but one that involves our active participation.

However, not everyone progresses at the same rate, and God expects patience and gentleness when we encounter others who are at different stages of understanding.

2 Timothy 2:24-25:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

We must be patient with those who oppose the truth or who are slow to grasp it. As Paul notes, it is only God who grants repentance and understanding, and our role is to teach with

gentleness and patience, trusting that God will illuminate the hearts and minds of others in His time.

Many believers often become frustrated when others do not understand or accept certain truths as quickly as they do. However, the Bible reminds us that God reveals truth progressively and in accordance with each individual's spiritual maturity.

Hebrews 5:12-14:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

This passage shows that spiritual maturity is necessary for believers to move beyond basic truths ("milk") and into deeper, more complex understanding ("meat"). It also emphasizes the importance of applying the truth we receive. If we do not put truth into practice, we risk losing it.

Hebrews 2:1:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

Truth can "slip" away if we do not hold onto it and solidify it in our minds. This is why constant engagement with God's Word is essential for spiritual growth and understanding.

Conclusion

The distinction between *inspiration*, *revelation*, and *illumination* is essential for understanding how God communicates His truth to us. *Inspiration* guarantees that the Bible is God's infallible Word, providing us with a trustworthy foundation. *Revelation* refers to the divine unveiling of truth, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ and recorded in Scripture. *Illumination*, on the other hand, is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to understand and apply these revealed truths.