

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

May 20, 2018

Illumination by the Holy Spirit

by Frank Himmel

The Bible affirms that it is the product of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. "All Scripture is inspired by God ..." (2 Timothy 3:16). "...No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21, NIV).

Some say the Spirit has another role when it comes to the Bible, that of acting directly on believers' minds as they read, enabling them to understand the Bible. This is often called the doctrine of illumination.

Commenting on Jesus' promise that the Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth, R. A. Torrey wrote:

We shall never truly know the truth until we are thus taught directly by the Holy Spirit. ... We must be taught directly by the Holy Spirit and we may be thus taught, each one of us. ... The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible and He stands ready to interpret its meaning to every believer every time he opens the Book. ... It is not enough that we have the revelation of God before us in the written Word to study, we must also have the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit to enable us to apprehend it as we study. (*The Person and Work of The Holy Spirit, Kindle Edition, 1613, 1652-53.*)

This doctrine of illumination by the Holy Spirit is false.

Common Sense Arguments Against It

If the Spirit is directly teaching all believers, guiding them in their understanding of the Bible, why do not all understand it alike? Clearly we disagree on many subjects, including something as fundamental as what a person must do to be saved. We do not all understand specific references the same way, either. Mark 16:16 is a prime example! Why is this? Why would the Spirit give opposite, contradictory views to different people?

The Bible says, in a context about the Spirit's work, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). While a different kind of confusion is under consideration in that verse, surely all agree that our differences in belief create confusion. Is that divine doing?

What about when I change my view of a text? Why would the Spirit previously have given me an erroneous view, only to correct it now? And how can I be certain He will not correct me again in the future? ▶



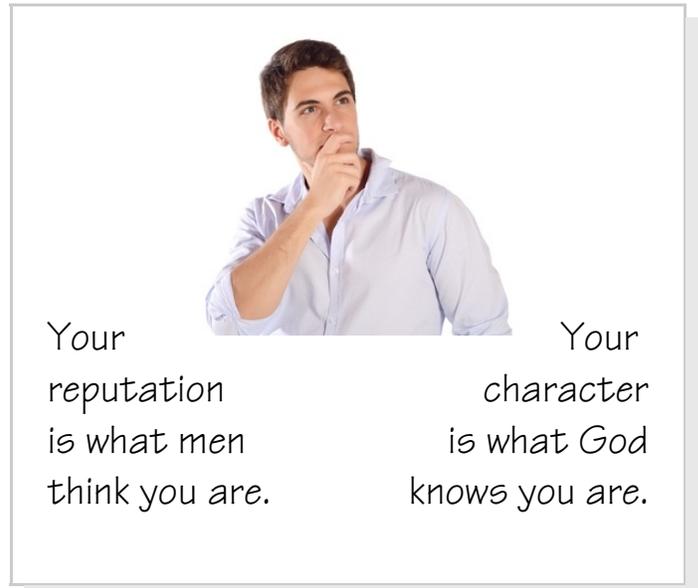
The Bible Does Not Teach It

First, the Bible says it can be understood. Paul affirmed, “That by revelation was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:3-4). He said nothing about needing extra illumination by the Holy Spirit.

Second, the Bible says it can be misunderstood. Jesus told the Sadducees, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Had the Spirit, Who “stands ready to interpret its meaning to every believer every time he opens the Book,” given the Sadducees their erroneous view?

Third, the verses used to teach this doctrine do not support it. The primary ones, John 14:26 and 16:13, were promises Jesus made to the apostles relating to their role of initially revealing the gospel. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 is about the apostles and prophets’ work. To apply these texts to all Bible students is a serious misapplication.

The other verses suggested are 1 John 2:20, 27, where John refers to “an anointing from the Holy One” that “abides in you” and “teaches you about all things” so that “you have no need for anyone to teach you.” If this is direct illumination from the Spirit, why does He not teach all the same things (this context is about discerning truth and error), why would we need teachers, and in fact, why would we even need the Bible? The



same chapter speaks of the word of God abiding in us (v. 20), what John’s readers had “heard from the beginning” (v. 24). That, not some special “anointing” as claimed by the false teachers John was combating (4:1), is the source of truth (cf. Jn. 8:31; 15:7).

Conclusion

Theologically, the false doctrine of illumination by the Holy Spirit is the outgrowth of another error, the notion that we are born totally depraved, incapable of doing good, including understanding the truth, until the Spirit directly changes our hearts. However, many who reject total depravity nevertheless embrace illumination.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 3:15). ■

Service Leaders for the Week		
	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	Howard Moore	Chris Brooks
SONG LEADER	Gary Hagler	Daven Daniel
OPENING PRAYER	Bruce Hollander	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	Sam Walters	
CUP	Kerry Gray	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Adam Wilson	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Greg Winget
CLOSING PRAYER	Adam Gibson	Albert Harrison Sr