

The Illumination of the Spirit

Roman Catholics: average 'layman'
cannot understand Scripture on his own

Clergy must interpret for the laity

Protestant denominations: illumination

They replace clergy with Holy Spirit –
He interprets Scriptures for them

- Two groups:
 1. Some limit Spirit's work to interpretation of Bible.
 2. Many claim Spirit leads them in everything.

I. History of illumination theory

Illumination

- Church ‘fathers’ first introduced total hereditary depravity...
 - So depraved that our minds cannot comprehend Scriptures without divine assistance
- “All men are conceived in sin, and born the children of wrath, indisposed to all saving good, propense to evil, dead in sin, and the slaves of sin, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they neither are willing nor able to return to God” *–McClintock and Strong*

“Church fathers”

- **Cyprian** (d. AD 254): a child is polluted with sin “though [its] life be but the length of one day upon the earth.” Therefore, he contended that no Christian should celebrate the day of his birth.
- **Augustine** (d. A.D. 430): popularized the concept of THD: Holy Spirit is “the means by which we receive God-written revelation.” He also affirmed that “He is necessary for illuminating and confirming its truth.”

“Illumination”

- Ep.1¹⁸ 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
- Ep.3⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ

“Illumination”

- Jn.1⁹ That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. [Jesus]
 - “Quaker’s text”
 - The only true light comes from Christ.
- 2 Tim.1¹⁰ but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
 - Each is enlightened to some degree by nature, conscience, Bible – McGarvey.
 - Ps.19 . . . Ro.1 . . . Ro.2

Reformers

- John Calvin (d. 1564): resurrected and popularized Augustine's views, and adopted his "illumination" doctrine.
- Luther, Zwingli et al. taught the need for special power of the H.S. that empowers us to comprehend the Scriptures

Moderns

1. Henry Thiessen: “The illumination of the Holy Spirit...is vouchsafed to every believer...” It will “enable us to understand the revelation God has already made of Himself, especially that revelation of Him in the Scriptures” (Lectures in Systematic Theology, 45).

- Why necessary?? Did Spirit-filled apostles need such lectures...?]

Moderns

2. Roy Zuck: former Bible professor at Dallas Theological Seminary: “No one can fully comprehend the meaning of the Bible unless he is regenerate.’ Even the Christian ‘must also depend upon the Holy Spirit’ for a correct view of the Scriptures” – Basic Bible Interpretation, 22-23

- Wrong. Ac.13:46-47

Moderns

2. Roy Zuck

- Ac.13⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.

I. History of illumination theory

**II. Examination of
illumination theory**

Many appeal to Jn.16:13

Context: last words to apostles...

- Mk.14¹⁷ in the evening He came with the twelve.
- Lord promises another Comforter: Spirit.
- 14:15-17, with you (16), with you (17); in you (17).
- World cannot receive these things (17)

[So much for the claim that HS must illuminate sinner's heart to understand Scripture]

Many appeal to Jn.14:25-26

- HS would teach them all things.
 - Can anyone today claim this?
- They could remember all that Jesus said (cf. 2:22; 12:16).
 - Not enough to quote NT – Ac.20:35.

Promised to men who were “with Him from the beginning,” Jn.15:26-27

- 14:5, Thomas
- 14:8, Philip
- 14:22, Judas (not Iscariot)
- 16:29, His disciples
- Ac.1:21-22, Matthias (Judas' replacement)
 - Who today is witness of His resurrection?
 - Paul: lone/last exception, 1 Co.15:8-10

Jn.16:12-15

Too much to receive at once

- **12:** would understand fully after Spirit came
- **13:** Spirit would guide them into all truth
- **13:** ...and enable them to know future events
- **14-15:** Spirit would glorify Him
 - Mt.10:19-20, given to them (1-5, twelve)
 - Ac.1-2

Many appeal to 1 Co.2:14

‘Natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit, therefore the sinner cannot understand Scriptures without direct guidance of Spirit.’

1. Consequences: if illumination is a ‘thing’ of the Spirit, the sinner cannot receive it.

2. Context: ‘natural man rejects revelation.’

1 Co.2:9-10, eye/ear, organs of perception

a. 6-7, 12, ‘we’ / ‘us’ received things from God.

Spirit→apostles→revealed (wrote) Spirit’s words, 13

b. 1 Co.2:14 speaks of the reception of revelation.

1 Co.2:14

The mind of the flesh is unable to 'receive the things of the Spirit untouched by the Holy Spirit. Certainly the initiative comes from God whose Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to accept the things of the Spirit of God' (ATR, Word Pictures, 89).

- Position blames God for sinner's condition.
- Who is the natural man?
 1. He does not accept things of the Spirit of God
 2. They are foolishness to him
 3. They are spiritually discerned

1 Co.2:14 – four options

1. Unconverted man? Ct. Ac.2, 3000, Pentecost
 - Unconverted did not judge Peter's message foolish
 - Unconverted could understand what Peter said
2. Uninspired man? (All three parts of v.14 reject it)
3. Man without Spirit's teaching?
 - No – v.14, they are foolishness to him.
4. Man who rejects Spirit's teaching.

Calvin

Quoted 1 Co.12:3 to prove his doctrine.

1. Passage proves the Spirit's revelation establishes Lordship of Christ.

➤ Contrast Jn.20:28

2. This was known before Pentecost (reception of Holy Spirit baptism), but due to revelation.

a. Context precludes possibility that every individual receives a direct personal enlightenment of the Spirit.

b. 1 Co.12:4-11, 28-30...leads to chap.13

Consequences

If Holy Spirit illuminates the 'Christian' in his studies, he is as infallible in his conclusions as apostles et al. were in revealing the message!

1. If an illuminated Christian ever changes his mind about a passage, was he not illuminated? Or did HS contribute to his error?
2. Since the Spirit would not contradict Himself, every illuminated Christian must agree with every other illuminated Christian on every point of doctrine!

Is this the case? No!

1. MacArthur, Sproul, Kennedy opposed Chuck Colson et al.
2. MacArthur and Sproul disagree on baptism.
3. Southern Baptist Convention.

If Holy Spirit illuminates people today...

Why do denominational preachers write books instructing their people about proper methods of Bible study?

1. These books would not help unbelievers (they lack spiritual capacity for welcoming / appropriating spiritual truths) - Zuck
2. These books would not help believers (they have illumination of Holy Spirit).
3. Doctrine of illumination contradicts teaching of Scripture – Ep.3:3-5. 2 Tim.3:16-17.

