

1. **Introduction:**

2. **What is the illumination of Scripture?**

A. Clement (ca. 95–97 AD)

- Clement reminds us that illumination is not the first act of the Spirit with respect to the Scriptures. First, the Holy Spirit performed the act of *inspiration*; of transmitting Scripture. The Holy Spirit, then, illumines that which he inspired.

“You have studied the Holy Scriptures, which are true, and given by the Holy Spirit. You know that nothing unjust or counterfeit is written in them.”<sup>15</sup>

- Clement is describing the doctrine which undergirds illumination; inspiration.
- Inspiration is the Spirit’s foundational relationship to Scripture, it is the foundational act of the Holy Spirit to the Word of God.
  - The prophets spoke by the authority of the Holy Spirit.
  - Jesus and the Apostles spoke by the Holy Spirit.
  - In 2 Tim 3:16, inspiration is the key expression of God bringing His Word into existence and He does this by His Spirit.

B. Charles Ryrie

“Specifically, the doctrine of illumination relates to that ministry of the Holy Spirit that helps the believer understand the truth of Scripture.”<sup>16</sup>

C. Timothy Ward

“This refers to the fact that it is only by the Holy Spirit opening our hearts and minds to his words in Scripture that we come to accept Scripture as the Word of God, to understand it and trust it.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Clement 45:2–3

<sup>16</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, “Illumination,” *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 544–545.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 92.

D. John Calvin

“[T]he Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers.”<sup>18</sup>

E. Frances Turretin

Hence if the question is why, or on account of what, do I believe the Bible to be divine, I will answer that I do so on account of the Scripture itself which by its marks proves itself to be such. If asked whence or from what I believe, I will answer from the Holy Spirit who produces that belief in me.<sup>19</sup>

- Illumination is the individual’s ability to savingly comprehend the truth of Scripture, believing that it is what it is; God’s Word [because it is possible to *hear* the Bible and even *know* what it means yet not believe it].

3. Biblical Teaching

A. Illumination provides an *inner* witness.

- Theologians have historically/formally referred to this as the “internal witness of the Holy Spirit.”
- It is a New Covenant reality related to indwelling of the Spirit.

“The Spirit inspires, illumines, and demonstrates the content of God’s word, and his indwelling presence motivates us to obey that word.”<sup>20</sup>

- **Jeremiah 31:33** “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”<sup>21</sup>
  - The resulting benefit is union with God in Christ (“I will be there God”).
  - Additionally it affects heart change where motives are tested, where the inner man is shaped by the Spirit.

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<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.3.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 2.6.6.

<sup>20</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 310.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 36:26–27.

- **2 Corinthians 3:3** “being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”
  - What is the purpose of this inner witness of the Spirit?
    - Sanctification; to progressively conform us into the image of Christ.
      - Galatians 5:16–25 is the key passage on this. We are indwelt by the Spirit in order to walk by the spirit and put the flesh to death (cf. Rom. 8:13-14, Col. 3:5).
    - To encourage us in the faith.
    - To assure us of the voice of Christ in Scripture (cf. John 10:4-5).

“. . . the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.<sup>23</sup>

- “God intends that Scripture should function in our lives as His Spirit-illuminated Word. It is the Spirit who opens man’s being to a keen personal awareness of God’s revelation.”<sup>24</sup>
- The Spirit in the *testimonium*, or internal testimony, works to confirm the reliability of Scripture, giving us certainty that the Bible is the Word of God. . . . In classical Christian thought, the believing individual makes a subjective response to the objective Word through the impetus of the Spirit.<sup>25</sup>
- Calvin said that the Holy Spirit testifies within us to affirm the Bible is the word of God, thus, that is where the issue of certainty must be solved, with respect to believing that Scripture is the word of God.
- When it comes to recognizing Scripture for what it is, the bridge from moral certitude to full certitude (faith/assurance) is accomplished by the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in the regenerate individual.

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<sup>22</sup> John Calvin, 1.7.4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1.7.5.

<sup>24</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God Revelation and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 4:273.

<sup>25</sup> R. C. Sproul, “The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 336.

- Illus: “Parable of the soils” (Luke 8:5–15; Mark 4:1-20). Only the fourth soil embraced the truth (Lk. 8:15 “hold it fast,” Mk 4:20 “accept it”).

B. Illumination provides a *persuasive* witness.

- **1 Thessalonians 1:5** “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”
  - Conviction was the consequence of convincing, which was the consequence of illumination.
- **1 Corinthians 2:4-5** “and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

“This demonstration and power leads to firm conviction . . . This ‘demonstration’ (*apodeixis*) does not convey truth content in addition to that of Scripture itself. Rather, it persuades us to embrace the content of the word itself.”<sup>26</sup>

**1 Thessalonians 2:13** For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

- “The Spirit is not mentioned merely as being the source of the content but as the basis of the persuasive power of the words.”<sup>27</sup>
- Passages which speak of the Word being in the believer via divine power (1 John 1:10; 2:14; 5:20); also “adoption” is closely aligned with the Spirit implanting His word in the believer – see Rom 8:15–16; Gal 4:6.

C. Illumination is the grounds for the meaningful application of Scripture.

- Psalm 40:8 “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.”

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<sup>26</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 309.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

“The Spirit works *with* the Word (*cum verbo*) and *through* the Word (*per verbum*), not *without* or apart from the Word (*sine verbo*).”<sup>28</sup>

- **Eph 1:17-18** “eyes of your heart/understanding being enlightened”
- **1 John 2:20, 24, 27** But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know...<sup>24</sup> As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father...<sup>27</sup> 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 (cf. 1 John 3:24; 4:13; 5:20).
- **Psalm 119:18** “Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.
- **Psalm 119:73** “Your hands made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
- **Psalm 139:23-24** “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”
- **Galatians 4:6** “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”
- **Romans 8:14** “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
- **Hebrews 4:12-13** “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”
- **John 17:17** “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth.”

Paul Lamey: How is it that so many can read the same Bible as we read and yet not understand it so as to apply and apprehend its authorial intent.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 338.

We see many examples in Scripture where people regularly read the Scriptures yet missed the message:

John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"

John 5:37-40 "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."

John 5:45-47 "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

#### 4. Implications of Illumination:

##### A. Illumination is not revelation but attestation.

"The Spirit acts to minister the meaning of the words of Scripture, not to manipulate or modify it."<sup>29</sup>

- Confusion over 1 Cor. 2:10-12 and John 16. Notice the careful distinction of the Apostle in 1 Cor. 2:10-12.

**1 Corinthians 2:10-13** "For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. **11** 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*."

Paul speaks of the Spirit's one-time act of inspiration through the chosen instruments of writing Scripture. Inspiration was that process which turned spiritual "thoughts" into spiritual "words."

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<sup>29</sup> Ward, 94.

**John 16:12-15** “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. **13** “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. **14** “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. **15** “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

Also Jesus’ words to the disciples in John 16 is not a once for all promise to every believer, but speaking about the act of inspiration.

“The work of the Holy Spirit in illumination...is the supernatural factor that enables us to hear the words of Scripture as God’s personal words to us. Here the author of the text opens the text to us.”<sup>30</sup>

B. Illumination is for believers only.

- Illumination is necessary because of universal depravity. God not only saves us from sin but gives us new eyes to see, behold, ponder, appropriate, and rejoice in His Word.
- The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is seen in the fact that he enables us to understand: “We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, *that we might understand* the gifts bestowed on us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12). Therefore, “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts (literally, things) of the Spirit of God” but “The spiritual man judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:14-15).<sup>31</sup>
- In the same way that general revelation cannot be understood properly without special revelation, so special revelation cannot be understood or received without the Spirit.

Nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened, so that, even when they can discuss and quote all that is in Scripture, they do not understand or really know any of it. . . The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture.<sup>32</sup>

[M]an is like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife, yea, like a log and a stone, like a lifeless statue which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart. For man neither sees nor perceives the terrible and fierce wrath of God on account of sin and death

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<sup>30</sup> Frame, 309.

<sup>31</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: IVP; Zondervan, 2004), 645.

<sup>32</sup> John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1961), 174–75.



but ever continues in his security, even knowingly and willingly, and thereby falls into a thousand dangers and finally into eternal death and damnation . . . until he is enlightened, converted, and regenerated by the Holy Ghost, for which indeed no stone or block, but man alone, was created.<sup>33</sup>

C. Illumination does not eliminate the need for human instruction.<sup>34</sup>

- **1 John 2:20-27** “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. 26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 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.

The following clause seems to suggest that the possession of the Spirit makes all human teachers unnecessary. This, however, cannot be John’s meaning, for he himself was engaged in teaching, and the New Testament commends the office of teacher (Eph. 4:11) and the gift of teaching (Rom. 12:7). . . . This teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is not the actual impartation of facts. Instead it is the commending of truth to the regenerated mind, the impartation of the ability to receive and appreciate truth, the activity of making revealed truth meaningful to the believer. In reality the apostle is magnifying the ability of the Christian layman to understand spiritual truth with the aid of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

“Believers do not have to consult learned professors of theology before they can accept God’s truth; in the sight of God, clergy and laity are the same; the Holy Spirit is the teacher of every believer, without distinction.”<sup>36</sup>

The biblical interpreter cannot wait for lightning bolts to hit him. He must study, read, and struggle to be in a position to receive the Spirit’s illumination. It is not

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther commenting in Psalm 90.

<sup>34</sup> Some draw this unnecessary conclusion from 1 John 2:27 however this passage teaches that the resident Holy Spirit instructs the believer to distinguish the true gospel from heresy so as not to be deceived by false teachers (“deceivers” vs. 26).

<sup>35</sup> Donald W. Burdick, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 46–47.

<sup>36</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of James and the Epistles of John* NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 286.



enough to open one's mouth and expect God to fill it at 11:00 o'clock on Sunday morning.<sup>37</sup>

D. Illumination is limited to God's Word (and doesn't mean that everything about God can be known).

- What about 1 John 2:27? "his anointing teaches you about all things"

[Commenting on "all things" in 1 John 2:27 Hiebert notes that it] "does not mean that the Spirit teaches believers in all spheres of knowledge; there is no suggestion of omniscience here! Rather, the Spirit teaches believers about all the things concerning which they need His teaching so that they may distinguish truth from error in any teaching being advanced."<sup>38</sup>

But true spirituality is not something found within us. It is something outside of us, created by the agency of God's transcendent Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit who is from God if we are to understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:12). And where do we go to hear from God's Spirit? . . . Only by listening to the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures can we know the love of God and be truly spiritual.<sup>39</sup>

E. Illumination is in concert with the diligent study of Scripture.

"Yet unless priority is given to the objectively inspired content of Scripture, Spirit-illumination readily gives way to private fantasy and mysticism." – Carl F. H. Henry

He never leaves us alone. He continues to speak his personal words to us through the biblical text. Hearing and learning Scripture are not impersonal, academic tasks. They are a person-to-person interaction with God as he teaches us his personal words.<sup>40</sup>

- **Ephesians 6:17** "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."
- In this way we see that anything or anyone who drives a wedge between the Spirit and the Word are on erroneous footing. The Spirit never leads us away from Christ and the only way to know Christ is according to His Word.

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<sup>37</sup> Wilber T. Dayton, "A Response to The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process," in *Summit II: Hermeneutical Papers* (Oakland: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1982), A8–9.

<sup>38</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 1991), 123.

<sup>39</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 90, 92.

<sup>40</sup> Frame, 310.

- Paul Lamey: Additionally, anything that glorifies the work of the Spirit and demotes the Bible is not from God.

God did not bring forth his Word among men for the sake of a momentary display, intending at the coming of his Spirit to abolish it. Rather, he sent down the same Spirit by whose power he had dispensed the Word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word.<sup>41</sup>

- Paul encourages Timothy that “the Lord will give you understanding” (2 Tim. 2:7) then immediately after says he should “be diligent” regarding his study and handling of the Word (2 Tim 2:15).

“We ought zealously to apply ourselves both to read and to hearken to Scripture if indeed we want to receive any gain and benefit from the Spirit of God.”<sup>42</sup>

- **Psalm 119:18** Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.
- **Psalm 119:73** Your hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
- **Psalm 139:23–24** Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; **24** And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

[I]llumination is not something that operates apart from a believer’s effort. What is our responsibility? The answer is in Ps. 119:130: ‘The unfolding of Thy words gives light.’ God’s words are unfolded first by discovery. Through diligent Bible study, we unfold or unwrap God’s truth. We discover that meditation with a view to applying the truth deepens its impact. Discovery and meditation combined bring the brightest light of illumination to our hearts.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Calvin, 1.9.3.

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, 1.9.2.

<sup>43</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., “The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 115.