

Illumination

Protege School of Leadership Leadership

Luke 24:31,32

- After the events of the resurrection morning, two disciples made their way home to Emmaus from Jerusalem.
- Jesus joined them as they walked, but at first they did not recognize Him.
- As they talked, Cleopas, one of the two, was surprised that the stranger did not seem to have heard the reports of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- Jesus responded by explaining the Scriptures, showing how the Messiah was to suffer and be raised from the dead.
- Though the two disciples were familiar with the Scriptures, they had not previously understood them.
- Later that evening, as they sat with Jesus and he broke bread in their sight, the Bible says, “Their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us along the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

Definition of Illumination

- What Jesus did with those two disciples on the Emmaus road is what the Holy Spirit does with Christians in their Bible study today.
- Because the Bible is a spiritual book, the Christian needs spiritual help when he comes to interpret it.
- As we come to read the Bible, the Holy Spirit aids us in understanding the Scriptures.

Illumination is the ministry of the Holy Spirit that enables us to understand and apply the spiritual message of the Scriptures.

- Theologians call this aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work “illumination.”
- When a Christian sits before an open Bible and begins to discover the truths of Scripture, this ministry of the Holy Spirit enables him to understand the message of Scripture.

Illumination is a ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- Some things cannot be learned apart from supernatural aid.
- The Holy Spirit directly illuminates men’s understanding.
 - John wrote, “By this know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2).
 - One of the reasons every Christian has the Holy Spirit is “that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12).
- Spiritual illumination is one of the distinguishing marks of the saved, as spiritual blindness is a mark of the unsaved.

- “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

Illumination results in an understanding of the Scripture.

- The Holy Spirit, who inspired men to write the Scriptures in the past, instructs Christians who read the Scriptures today.
 - The author of the book is always the one who best understands his writing.
 - In the same way, the divine Author of Scripture is best suited to teach us the things of God.
 - Jesus told his disciples, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...he shall take of mine and shew it unto you” (John 16:13-15).
- In the experience of some of these early disciples, the Holy Spirit ministered through revelation to write the Scripture.
 - Today the same Holy Spirit takes the inspired Word and ministers in our lives through illumination (1 Cor. 2:12-16).

Illumination is dependent upon a man’s relation with God.

- God never forces his truth upon any individual.
 - Sometimes we miss out on what God wants to give us because of our unwillingness to cooperate with Him.
- When we come to interpret the Bible, we must be careful not to allow sin to hinder the Spirit of God.
 - We must be willing to respond positively to the Scriptures if we expect God to teach us.
 - David prayed, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (Ps. 119:33,34).

The Need for Illumination

- The Holy Spirit helps us focus on the important truths we need to know.
 - Actually, our spiritual illumination is more than an aid to natural understanding; the Bible describes our problem as hardness of heart.

Hardness is the inability or the unwillingness to understand the spiritual message of the Scriptures.

- Some men have known more of the Bible than some Christians in terms of actual content, but they did not understand the spiritual truth of redemption, repentance, and regeneration.

The Bible speaks of three occasions when spiritual discernment was not possible.

Israel's hardness of heart.

- The Bible speaks of a partial and temporary insensibility of the nation of Israel.
 - The Jews, who had the Scriptures and should have welcomed their Messiah, rejected Him and called for His crucifixion.
 - "He (Jesus) came unto his own (the Jews), and his own received him not" (John 1:11).
 - Paul spoke of "blindness (hardness)" as happening to Israel (Rom. 11:25).
- Israel's rejection is temporary.
 - The time is coming when many Jews will turn to Christ (Rom. 11:26; 2 Cor. 3:14,15).

The blindness of unbelief.

- The Bible also identifies a type of blindness of unsaved people.
 - John wrote, "He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not where he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:11).
- This darkness is overcome with the light of the gospel.
 - Writing of the birth of Christ hundreds of years before the event, Isaiah wrote, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isa. 9:2).
- From the fall of man to the spread of Christianity to the Gentiles, Gentiles knew nothing but spiritual darkness.
 - Unsaved heathen today are still in this blindness.
 - Jesus told Nicodemus that, apart from a spiritual rebirth, he could not "see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).
 - Writing to the Corinthians (primarily Gentiles) Paul wrote, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:3,4).
 - Satan has imposed a blindness upon both unsaved Jew and Gentile to prevent them from seeing (understanding) the gospel and believing in Christ.
- Even after salvation, it is possible for a Christian to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit by allowing sin to continue in his life.
 - Paul exhorted the Colossian Christians to "walk worthy of the Lord" in order to be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).
 - If we try to interpret the Bible knowing there is unconfessed sin in our lives, the Holy Spirit will not be able to show us all we need to learn.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Illumination

- Illumination is one of the many present-day ministries of the Holy Spirit to Christians.
 - He can reveal to us important spiritual truths we could not otherwise know.
- While we normally think of illumination in terms of helping the Christian understand the Bible, it occurs as conviction to the unsaved.

Conviction to the unsaved.

- Conviction is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus said, “When he is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).
 - The word “convict” means “to rebuke or to cause to see.”
- Before a person receives Christ as Savior, the main work of the Holy Spirit is to help that individual to see his need for the Savior.
 - The Holy Spirit convicts by causing the sinner to see his sin, to see the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and to see the sin judgment of the cross (John 16:9-11).
 - When the sinner is convicted of (sees) his sin, he is rebuked or convicted.
 - Then he is motivated to seek salvation.

The next two sections examine the principles that must be obeyed when we come to study the Bible. Both are important. The man who is spiritually right with God, yet fails to give attention to the normal rules of language interpretation will miss out on the message of Scripture. The man who follows these principles of interpretation exactly, but is not walking in fellowship with God, will also miss important lessons when he attempts to interpret the Bible.

Understanding to the saved.

- The other aspect of this ministry of the Holy Spirit is in helping the Christian to understand the Bible.
 - As a Christian reads his Bible, the Holy Spirit causes that man to understand God’s plan for his salvation.
 - The same man without the Holy Spirit would be unable to uncover spiritual truth from the passage, “but he that is spiritual judgeth all things” (1 Cor. 2:15).
- As we seek to interpret and apply the Bible to our lives, we realize that the Holy Spirit is our Teacher (John 14:26; 16:13,14).

Spiritual Principles of Interpreting the Bible

- If God used holy men of God to write his Book, he wants holy men of God to interpret his Book.
 - If we are not in proper relation with God, it is not realistic to think we will be able to interpret the Bible rightly.

Prayer.

- Every Christian needs to pray as he comes to study the Bible.
 - The Bible is God’s revelation to man.
 - As we come to hear what God has to say, we need to talk to God.
 - David prayed, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18).
 - This ought to be our prayer as we come to interpret the Bible.

Cleansing.

- Sin in the life of a Christian will hinder the Holy Spirit from illuminating the Scriptures.
 - It is important that we are not harboring unconfessed sin in our lives if we expect God to teach us through the Bible.
 - Because no one is perfect, we need constantly to apply the principle of 1 John 1:9 to maintain our fellowship with God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 - Naturally, the Christian must strive to live a pure life, but when we fail, God is willing to forgive if we will confess.
- No one can have a cleansed life until he first receives Christ as personal Savior.
 - Jesus told His disciples “that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).
 - The righteousness Jesus requires of his disciples is not a superior list of standards or perfect lifestyles.
 - Rather, everyone should receive the righteousness of God by faith (Rom. 3:24,25).
- At salvation, we are first cleansed, but as we live in this world, we are contaminated by the affairs of life.
 - When we sin, we need to be cleansed so we can restore our broken fellowship with God.
 - Jesus said, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all” (John 13:10).

Comparing Scripture.

- The Bible is the best interpreter of itself.
 - As we study the Bible, we should learn to compare the Scriptures we are studying with other relevant passages of Scripture to interpret the Bible.

Literary Principles of Interpreting the Bible

- Conservatives believe in a “historical grammatical” interpretation of the Bible.
 - This basically means that we study the Bible within its historical context.
 - In other words, we interpret the Bible as we would normally interpret any literary work, using the normal rules of grammar.

Historical context.

- As we come to interpret a passage, we must consider the historical context of the passage.
 - Since the author spoke to a historical setting, we must understand something about that background to interpret the text.
 - Also, the more we know about the author, the easier it will be to determine what he wanted to say in the passage.
- Men wrote the Bible to other individuals or groups.
 - The good interpreter of the Bible will also interpret a passage in light of the recipients of the message.

- We should also consider the place of the passage in the context of the total message of the book in which it is found.

Grammatical context.

- Words are important.
 - God inspired the words of Scripture.
- When both the Old and New Testaments were being written, God chose to use Hebrew and Greek, explicit languages to write his Word.
 - God chose to give his Word first to people in a culture that was very careful about the words used.
- When we interpret the Bible, we should use our knowledge of grammar to interpret the passage.

Literal meaning.

- The Bible should be interpreted literally, which means we should seek the obvious meaning, of words, context, and language.
 - When we interpret literally, we seek the literal meaning of the author when he wrote or spoke the message of God.
 - We should not seek for a hidden or mystical meaning.
- If God had written his message in esoteric pictures, there would be no objectivity to Christianity.
 - Anyone could make a passage mean anything he desired.
 - Hence, there could be no Christianity.
- Do not stumble over the word “mystery” in Scripture (Eph. 3:8).
 - A mystery was part of the message of grace that was hidden in the Old Testament, but revealed in the New.

Figurative language.

- The Bible contains much figurative language, such as metaphors, simile, parables, and many other figures of speech.
 - It is generally clear when figurative language appears that a clear understandable message is being taught.
- To interpret the Bible, the reader must search for the literal meaning the author had in mind when he used the figurative language.
 - The principle of interpreting Scripture according to the meaning of the author should remind us that the Bible has two authors--human and divine.
 - Therefore, we must follow human laws of interpretation to understand Scripture.
 - But we must also follow the spiritual principles of illumination to understand the mind of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

- God has given us a revelation of Himself in the Bible.
 - He did not give it to us to frustrate us with something we could not understand.
- He also gave each Christian the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scriptures, so that the message of God could be understood.
 - As we study the Bible, we need to apply sound principles of interpretation.
 - While we recognize that man will sometimes disagree, we believe the problem stems from wrong application of literary principles or spiritual problems in the believer's life.
 - But when diligently applied, you can begin to understand God's message in the Bible.