

The Person and Work of God the Holy Spirit

A Study

Part I - The Person of God the Holy Spirit

Lesson 6 - The Illuminator

John 16:13-15

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.

Lucky Dipping and the Anointing

But along with this legitimate anointing comes the counterfeit. One such “counterfeit anointing” or a misuse of the genuine anointing of the Holy Spirit has sadly become very popular with many in the modern Church. It is called various things. Theologians call it “pneumatic exegesis” while many lay people refer to it as, “lucky dipping”.

This strange activity involves holding the Bible in your hands, closing your eyes, and flipping through the pages stopping suddenly on a random page and placing your finger somewhere on that page. Whatever that verse says should have something to do with your personal immediate situation, but only as long as you use it completely out of context from its original intent.

Lucky dipping or “pneumatic exegesis” seeks to improperly use Scripture and even God the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible through some kind of spiritual machination. This activity does not simply *border* on magic and superstition, it absolutely crosses that border. This way of interpreting Scripture is not a gift of God to Man. It is an offense against God the Holy Spirit and it makes a mockery of the true anointing of the Holy Spirit. Turning the Bible into a crystal ball is certainly not according to the intent of the Spirit in His work of inspiring the Bible.

There was a similar episode in the life of Augustine, the great theologian of the first millennium. Before his conversion, Augustine earned a reputation for living a wild, unbridled, and licentious lifestyle. His godly mother, Monica, prayed earnestly for a long time that her son would come to Christ. One day, as Augustine recounts in his memoir, “Confessions”, he was meditating in a garden trying to understand the truth amid his confusion over the various philosophical systems of his day. Some children were playing a game nearby, and Augustine could hear them chanting an odd refrain,

“Tolle lege, tolle lege,”

... which in Latin means,

“Take up and read, take up and read.”

Augustine found a copy of the Christian Scriptures nearby, *took it up* in his hands and began to *read* where the pages fell open. They fell open to the **Book of Romans**, where Paul said:

Romans 13:13&14

13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

When Augustine’s eyes fell on that text, he was immediately stricken with guilt and awakened to the things of God. At that moment, he was born again by the Holy Spirit.

But what is the difference between Augustine’s experience and the experience of “lucky dipping”? Augustine did not try to discern God’s will through a superstitious or magical process. He simply picked up the Scriptures and happened to read in a certain place. But most important of all, Augustine did not “receive” a “private interpretation” of the text that he read by any other method other than that the clear and plain meaning of the words that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write in their correct context.

2Peter 1:20

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,

God the Holy Spirit enabled Augustine to understand what the Biblical text really meant. There was no magic in it at all and it wasn’t taken out of context. What happened to Augustine 1,700 years ago was an example of “Divine Illumination” and is a correct and God-honoring work of God the Holy Spirit.

Illumination Versus Revelation

But we must always make a clear distinction between the Spirit’s work of “Divine *Illumination*” and His work of “Divine *Revelation*”. And this goes way beyond mere semantical differences. God the Holy Spirit inspired the biblical revelation- the eternal truth of God that is unfolded and unveiled for us on the pages of the 66 Books of the Holy Bible by Sovereignly “moving” on the forty human writers so that as they wrote what they wrote, and it was the will and the word of God.

2Peter 1:21

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

So, revelation is information that comes to us from the very mind of God Himself by way of the Holy Spirit moving on the various writers. So, while sinful and frail men *wrote* the

Scriptures, God the Holy Spirit *authored* them. Therefore, divine revelation is when God the Holy Spirit gives us divine truth in Scripture.

Illumination however is the proper *understanding* of that divine revelation. Therefore, Illumination provides no new information to us. It simply *illuminates* or makes known to our minds the information that the Spirit has already given in the Scriptures.

When God the Holy Spirit used that childish chant to provoke Augustine to read the text of **Romans**, He did not at that moment give any new information for Augustine's sake. Neither did He provide Augustine with a new "take" on some old verses as is so commonly testified today. No, He simply directed Augustine to read a passage of Scripture that was true and was there for everyone else to read.

But thousands and thousands of people had read that text before Augustine and yet did not see themselves in it. And this means that God the Holy Spirit had not (as of yet) *illuminated* the truth of that verse to them and therefore they had not been convicted by it and so remained untouched, unbroken, and unbowed to the command that God gave through it.

But on that day, by God's grace and to God's glory, God moved upon the lost and sinful Augustine to open his mind so that he could receive the correct illumination of that verse by a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Spirit worked in Augustine to help him understand the truth of God in the inspired words he read. And the result was that this wicked sinner was smitten to his core with conviction, repented of his sins, trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ, and was redeemed!

The Apostle Paul was one who was so moved by God the Holy Spirit to pen down the explanation of why some people are brought to repentance and others are not when he wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**,

6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;

7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

8 *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

9 but just as it is written, "*THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.*"

10 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*.

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

What does Paul mean when he says in verse 10,

“... the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God”?

Normally, when we use the word, “search”, we are referring to the act of trying to find something that we want to locate or discover. If I am on a quest for knowledge, a search for knowledge, then I am trying to learn something I do not already know or understand.

So, when Paul says the Spirit “searches” the depths of God, it would seem that he is teaching that God the Holy Spirit is pursuing after some knowledge that He doesn’t already possess. But is that a correct way to understand this?

If we conclude that there are certain things that God the Holy Spirit does not already know and therefore needs to learn, we have belittled Him and made Him to be less than fully deity. That effectively destroys The Doctrine of the Trinity which categorically stipulates that the Holy Spirit is fully God. Any lack of knowledge on the part of the Holy Spirit would deny His Deity and thus cast Him out from participation in the Trinity.

So, we must do what the other verse tells us to do and understand *this* part of the Bible by correctly understanding *another* part of the Bible. In other words, we need to allow the Scripture itself to interpret the Scripture and resist the temptation to put our own humanly engineered interpretation on this verse. Another way of understanding this is that in order to comprehend what God the Holy Spirit meant when He moved upon Paul to write **1Corinthians 2:10**, we need to have what God the Holy Spirit moved upon Paul to write in **1Corinthians 2:13** illumined to us.

1Corinthians 2:13

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*.

So, as we accept what the rest of Scripture teaches about God the Holy Spirit, that He is a part of the Godhead and therefore completely Omniscient, we realize that He does *not* “search” the depths of God in order to increase His own knowledge.

No, Paul is simply telling us here that the Holy Spirit searches the depths of God **ON OUR BEHALF**. So, the Holy Spirit acts as a searchlight and shines on the text of Scripture when we sincerely and earnestly read it giving us the capacity to understand the true meaning of it (illumination). And when this miracle happens, we see the truth of God intensely and sharply and correctly.

There may be literally thousands of different ways in which we could *apply* the truth of Scripture to our lives, but we must know that while that is true there is only one single correct *meaning* of every verse in the Bible. The Scriptures do not mean what we want them to mean. They mean what God intended them to mean. So, we do not have the liberty or the license to take a verse of sacred Scripture out of context and push our own personal meaning on to it.

The purpose of reading and studying the Bible is to uncover and to discover that single true meaning so that we may then apply that eternal divine truth to our own lives. And to do that two things must happen:

1. We must put forth the effort and the time using as many tools as possible to arrive at that one single meaning as best as we can.
2. God the Holy Spirit must sovereignly illumine our minds

2Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

1Corinthians 2:13

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*.

2,000 years of Church history teaches us that studying the Scriptures without being sovereignly illumined by God the Holy Spirit leads to dry and powerless academics while illumination of the Holy Spirit without diligent and careful exegesis (taking out of Scripture only what the Holy Spirit put into it) will lead to terrible and destructive heresies.

Being earnest is good. Being sincere is great. Being passionate about God is wonderful. But because we are fallen creatures, and because we have an enormous capacity to be deceived, mere earnestness and sincerity and passion is not enough when it comes to understanding the Holy Scriptures. We simply cannot trust ourselves. Every single major heresy that has plagued the Church for centuries and has made millions of lives shipwreck was begun by people who were absolutely sure that God had spoken to them and that the Holy Spirit had provided them with a “new revelation” that was as right as rain.

The flip side is that we are told over and over to study and to learn and to be taught. God the Spirit gave and anointed teachers to the Church so that we could be “equipped” (**Ephesians 4:11-13**). But trying to learn about a supernatural God using only natural means always, and in all cases, leads to words with no life and doctrines with no power.

So, in His wisdom, God gave two means by which we as frail and sinful humans can understand God’s Will and Word:

- A. Reading and studying and researching the Scriptures with fear and trembling
- B. Sovereign illumination of the Scriptures we have studied and read and researched

Every one of us who is a Christian has had this experience sometime in his or her life. We are reading from the Scriptures, and suddenly a particular truth seems to jump off the page and pierce our souls. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in illumination.

In the year 1734, a sermon was preached at Northampton, Massachusetts which I believe was one of the most important sermons ever preached on what is now U.S. soil. The man who preached it, Jonathan Edwards, is more famous for a different sermon, “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*,” which he preached in Enfield, Connecticut, in 1741.

Many anthologies of American literature include “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*” as a representative example of writing in Colonial New England. But the earlier sermon that I believe was so very important was given this title: “*A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to Be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine.*”

This sermon is not very well known or widely circulated, but I think that if any sermon captures Edwards' genius it is this one. In this sermon, Edwards was speaking about supernatural illumination by God the Holy Spirit toward Man and he defines this "spiritual light" by saying,

*"And it may be thus described: a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising. This spiritual light primarily consists in the former of these, viz., a real sense and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the word of God. A spiritual and saving conviction of the truth and reality of these things, arises from such a sight of their divine excellency and glory; so that this conviction of their truth is an effect and natural consequence of this sight of their divine glory."*¹

According to Edwards, the primary effect of the Spirit's work of illumination is to awaken in us a sense of the divine excellence of the things of God. We may be persuaded that Christ is divine and still not grasp the sweetness of that idea. There may not yet be affection for Him in our hearts or souls. The Spirit awakens in us a sensibility to the excellence of the things of God. But He does not operate *against* the Word of God.

The Spirit works *in* the Word, *with* the Word, and *through* the Word. In other words, He takes us to the revelation of God (Scripture) and shows it to us in such a way that He Sovereignly overcomes our natural hostility or bias against the truth of God and shows us the loveliness of it. Just as Ezekiel swallowed the scroll with its bitter words and found them suddenly sweet as honey in his mouth (**Ezekiel 3:3**), so the words of God become sweet to all who view them under the searchlight of the Spirit.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

¹ Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine," http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/sermons/supernatural_light.html, accessed July 5, page 2