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QUESTION #13 - What is meant by the term "Illumination"?

No study of Bibliology is complete without some understanding of the doctrine of illumination. As we have already observed from this doctrinal study: 1) God revealing and disclosing truth to man which man would not otherwise know is the doctrinal matter of revelation; 2) God using men to record His truth in writing His word is the doctrinal matter of inspiration; 3) However, God permitting man to understand His truth which He did put in writing is the doctrinal matter of Illumination.

Generally speaking, **Illumination is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that enables the believer to understand God's written word.**

Illumination has been defined by skilled theologians the following ways:

- 1) "...illumination relates to the ministry of the Holy Spirit helping the believer to understand the truth of the Bible." (Charles Ryrie, p.116).
- 2) "Illumination can thus be defined as the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He enlightens those who are in a right relationship with Him to comprehend the written word of God." (Paul Enns, p.175)
- 3) "The work of the Spirit of God in making known to the individual the things which God has prepared for them that love Him is called Illumination." (Charles Baker, 45)
- 4) "...the activity whereby the Holy Spirit gives His people an understanding of divine truth." (Floyd Barackman, p.215)

In a pure doctrinal technical sense, "illumination" comes under the doctrine of Pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, since understanding God's written word requires the illumination work of the Holy Spirit, it is important to gain some doctrinal perspective of it in a study of Bibliology, which is the doctrine of the Bible.

Once the truth of God had been put into writing, there was no further need for revelation or inspiration, but there was a new need for Illumination. Whereas "revelation" reveals truth and "inspiration" records truth, "illumination" understands truth, which has been revealed and inspired.

The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is most definitely needed for various reasons:

Reason #1- Because of our intellectual condition.

Our minds are at best finite and the mind of God is infinite. In fact, the Scriptures are very clear that man's mind, in and of itself, cannot even begin to comprehend the things of God (I Cor.2:11). To understand things intangible, eternal, invisible and heavenly requires the work of one whose mind is far beyond that of a mere human being. In order to intellectually grasp God's word requires the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

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Reason #2 - Because of our spiritual condition.

Every human being is greatly lacking in His knowledge of God and His word because of a spiritual darkness which has existed in all humans since the fall in Eden. The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is needed in every phase of a person's spiritual life and relationship with God and, in fact, may become even more critical after salvation rather than prior to salvation.

Before salvation, the Spirit of God illuminates by way of convicting one of the need to believe on Jesus Christ. At this time the individual is not indwelt by the Spirit of God. However, it is after salvation when the Holy Spirit begins His work of illumination which enables the believer to understand God's truth. It is also the Holy Spirit who determines the level of spiritual growth. Once the Spirit of God is actually in a person, lack of growth and maturity is a real eternal tragedy.

At the judgment of Jesus Christ, believers who did not grow and mature into a meat level in understanding God's word will forever regret it, for God's Spirit was specifically given to the believer, in part, to accomplish this very objective. According to the Bible, there are at least four different types of spiritual blindnesses, which immediately negate the possibility of a human naturally relying upon his own ability to gain spiritual depth and maturity. These blindnesses all demand the reality of God's Spirit doing a supernatural work of illumination:

(Spiritual Blindness Type #1) - Israel's Blindness.

This is a spiritual blindness which was clearly predicted and discussed in both the O.T. and the N.T. and one clearly determined and implemented by God. God, in His sovereignty, has temporarily blinded the nation Israel so that very few Jewish people ever come to faith in Jesus Christ and so that the nation, as a whole, cannot fulfill, as yet, her prophetic destiny (Is.6:9-10; Mt.13:14-15; Mk.4:10-12; Lk.8:9-10; Jn.12:37-40; Acts 8:25-27; Rom.11:13-25; II Cor.3:12-16). We know that this blindness is temporary and will be nationally lifted when Christ returns at the close of the Tribulation (Mt.23:37-39/24:29-30).

(Spiritual Blindness Type #2) - Gentile Blindness.

There is no question that presently the lost Gentile world is under a blind darkness, which keeps them from recognizing their own need, from recognizing the truth of God's word and from recognizing true spiritual light and life (John 1:5; Eph.3:8-9; I John 2:11). One of the major symptoms of this blindness is the Gentile nation's inability to recognize the importance of Israel. However, a time will come when the Gentile nations will recognize her special position and will actually be judged in light of how Israel was treated (Mt.24:31-46).

(Spiritual Blindness Type #3) - Satanic Blindness.

II Corinthians 4:3-4 makes it very clear that Satan is specifically involved in blinding the minds

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of both Jews and Gentiles, in this age, specifically regarding the Gospel. The primary tool that God uses to break through this blindness is an accurate communication of the Word of God (Rom.10:17).

(Spiritual Blindness Type #4) - Carnal Blindness.

Those who are believers, who are not living their lives in accordance with the Word of God and the Spirit of God are blinded by God and kept from growing and maturing (I Cor.3:1-2; Heb.5:12-14).

By virtue of the fact that these types of spiritual blindness are presently operative in this world, we can immediately see the great need for the illuminating work of the Spirit of God.

According to the New Testament, there are at least four different spiritual capacities, related to one's ability to truly comprehend and grasp spiritual truth:

Spiritual Capacity #1 – No Capacity. I Cor.2:14

This is the person who is classified as the "natural man." This person **is not** a believer and has absolutely no capacity for comprehending spiritual truth.

This person is in need of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to bring him under conviction of sin, of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:7-9) so that he might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Capacity #2 – Mature Capacity. I Cor.2:15-16

This is the person who may be classified as "spiritual." This person is one who, because of his sensitivity to God's Spirit and God's word, is able to "appraise all things." It is this person who is maturing and developing in the "mind of Christ."

This person needs the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit for further growth and development. This person needs to continue to blossom to greater levels of Christ likeness and greater depth levels in understanding God's word.

Spiritual Capacity #3 – Infant Capacity. I Cor.3:1

This is the person who is a new believer, a new Christian who has just been born again. This is one who has just recently trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and is at an infant level in his/her spiritual life because he/she is a new babe in Christ. Such a person is at a novice level, an infant level of understanding of the things of God. It is very important to observe that according to God's Word (i.e. I Pet.2:2), the **one and only** thing that will bring one to maturity and to proper growth is the Word of God.

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The importance of the Word of God for growth is true in any of the spiritual capacities. It is the word of God that produces growth. This is precisely why it is so important that a local church be intent upon feeding people the pure, true word of God in a way that is "rightly divided." The Spirit of God works through the Word of God to develop the people of God.

It also needs to be pointed out that it is a great mistake and in fact an act of disobedience to allow a new babe in Christ to be put into any position of church leadership (I Tim.3:6). According to God, **before one may lead, one must learn**. Many new believers have been spiritually ruined because this important truth has been neglected. A church gets excited over a new person who trusts Christ and then makes the grave mistake of exalting them and promoting them to levels of which they are not spiritually mature enough to handle. Those at an infant level need to grow and mature before they lead and teach.

How ridiculous it would be to have first year biology students give a lecture to a group of medical doctors. How ridiculous it would be to allow a first year piano student to be featured in a concert with a major symphony orchestra. So it is just as ridiculous to allow a new Christian to teach or be in a position of leadership. A church can actually ruin the spiritual life of such a person, for the Spirit of God has not, as yet, had time to develop that individual.

The babe in Christ needs the Spirit of God and the Word of God in order that he/she might grow and mature to become a strong believer. The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is clearly needed in the life of the new believer.

Spiritual Capacity #4 – Stunted Capacity. I Cor.3:1

This is the person who is saved and who has had the Spirit of God in his/her life for a while but is carnel and fleshly. This is the believer who has made a habit of continually yielding to the flesh as opposed to continually yielding to the Spirit of God.

This person does have God's Spirit in him, but he **does not** have God's Spirit illuminating him. When the Spirit of God searches this believer in connection to his willingness to submit himself to the Word of God (I Cor.2:10-12), He makes a determination of that believers true and real spiritual condition. If the Holy Spirit determines that the believer is actually lining up his/her life with God's word and trying to apply it to life, He illuminates this one and permits him/her to grow and develop into the deeper things of God. If, on the other hand, God's Spirit concludes that the believer **is not** responding to God's word and is not really trying to apply it to his life, God's Spirit **refuses** to illuminate that person and does not permit that believer to grow, develop and mature (I Cor.3:1-2; Heb.5:11-6:3).

There is no doubt that one of the Biblical symptoms of carnality is a Divinely ordered inability to grasp the deeper things of God (I Cor.3:1-2; Heb.5:12-14). To a large extent, we may determine our spiritual condition by our diet! If there is not a burning desire to know more and more of God's doctrines and word, the illuminating work is being