

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "The Necessity of Illumination"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/22/2009

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Turn with me in your Bibles, please to the book of First Corinthians chapter 2. Let us hear the Word of the Lord:

1. And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.
2. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
3. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.
4. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
5. that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.
6. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.
7. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,
8. which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

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9. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
 10. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.
 11. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.
 12. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
 13. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
 14. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
 15. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.
 16. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?"
But we have the mind of Christ.
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Thus ends the reading of God's inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word.

In this series, we've been dealing with the question of what it means to be a Scripture-driven church. What does it mean, for each of us as individual believers? And what does it mean, for the church as a body?

And that over-arching question led us on to a pair of subsidiary questions. Our first question was this: What is the nature of the Book we hold in our hands? And we saw from Second Peter chapter two that it is revelation given by inspiration. Revelation given by inspiration. "No prophecy of Scripture originated in the human writer's own personal determination of what is true or not true, for this reason, Peter writes, that prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved – as they were driven – by the Holy Spirit."

And Paul states this again for us very succinctly in the passage we just read, in verse 10: "God has revealed these things to us, through His Spirit." The Bible is revelation given by inspiration. That is the nature of this Book. The nature of the Bible is that it is supernatural. It is the only supernatural Book.

Holy men of God were driven by the Spirit of God to write this Book, so that we, in every thought, word, and action, might be driven by this Book.

So today, we come to our second question. In light of these two great doctrines of revelation and inspiration, how are we to use this Book, as individual Christians, and

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as the church? And in the passage we're considering today, Second Corinthians chapter two, we find two additional great doctrines that tell us what we are to do.

We find that the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sets up a great contrast throughout this passage – a great divide. And that divide is between the natural, and the spiritual, between that which is of this world, and that which is of faith in Christ.

He speaks, on the one hand, of "human wisdom" (verse 3) – "the wisdom of men" (verse 4) – "the wisdom of this age" (verse 5) – "the things of man" (verse 11) – "the spirit of the world" (verse 12) – and "man's wisdom" (verse 13).

And he speaks, on the other hand, of "the demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (verse 4) – "the power of God" (verse 5) – "the wisdom of God" and "hidden wisdom" (verse 7) – "the deep things of God" (verse 10) – "wisdom which the Holy Spirit teaches" (verse 13) – "things that are spiritually discerned" (verse 14) – and "the mind of Christ" (verse 16).

We saw this same great divide, this great contrast, in Second Peter last week – Scripture never came by the will of man, or man's understanding of things. The Bible is not a natural Book. It is a spiritual Book. It is a supernatural Book. It is the only supernatural Book. It is revealed truth – revelation given by inspiration.

But Paul's focus here in First Corinthians is on the implications of those two great doctrines. He tells us where those two doctrines lead us. There are two other great

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doctrines that we need to understand – a third and a fourth doctrine concerning Scripture. And the third and fourth great doctrines have their foundation in the first two.

The third great doctrine of Scripture is the doctrine of the necessity of illumination by the Holy Spirit. The necessity of illumination by the Holy Spirit. Verse 9 – “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Many times, we hear this verse quoted by itself. It’s a favorite verse of many of us. We rejoice in that hope of the things that God has prepared for His saints in the life to come. But some men want to take this verse out of context and use it as a proof text for a doctrine of the unknowability of God – the unknowability of God. But that is not the point at all.

We cannot know everything about God. That is true. But God is knowable. He has revealed Himself. “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard,” yes, that is true. But then we come to verse 10 – “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” And let’s read on: “For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”

And then in verse 14 we have the great contrast: "But – the natural man" – the unsaved man – “does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.” In the original, the

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force is that the unsaved man does not accept them as true. Why? "For they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them." He cannot understand them, he is incapable of understanding them. Why? "Because they are spiritually discerned."

That word "foolishness" in verse 14 is the Greek from which we get the word moron. To the unbelieving mind, the humanistic mind, the postmodern mind, the Bible is foolishness. Christianity is the talk of morons. We Christians are morons in the eyes of the unbelieving world. And we certainly see that attitude among unbelievers today. The postmodern mind cannot tolerate the concept of objective truth – a singular, transcendent, objective standard of truth. That is the position of the natural man, the unsaved man, in contrast with the position of the spiritual man, the saved man. The spiritual man understands that there is an objective standard of truth, and the spiritual man understands that the only place we find it is in the Word of God. And this tells us two important things regarding Scripture.

First, no one can truly believe, truly understand, that this is the Word of God, unless he is already a Christian. Genuine understanding of the fact that the Bible is truly the Word of God doesn't come first. New life comes first. The Holy Spirit comes first. He regenerates you – makes you alive in Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells you. God makes you a Christian first. Then He really begins to illuminate the Bible for you. If you really believe and really understand that this is the Word of God, that understanding is the result of illumination by the Holy Spirit. You can only have it because the Spirit of God is at work within you. Otherwise, it is impossible.

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To put it the opposite way: If you have not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you have not passed from eternal death to eternal life, if you have not passed out of darkness and into the light, you cannot possibly have come to the point where you truly believe and fully understand that the Bible is the Word of God. The non-Christian may say that he believes this is the Word of God. But the fact is that the non-Christian doesn't even know what it means to say that the Bible is the Word of God.

Second, no one can truly understand and properly interpret the Word of God unless he is a Christian. Notice verse 12 – “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” But here again is the contrast, verse 14: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them.” He is utterly incapable of knowing them. Why? “Because they are spiritually discerned.”

No one can truly understand and properly interpret the Scriptures, unless he is a Christian. The non-Christian completely lacks the power to understand and interpret this Book, because he does not have the power of spiritual perception that comes only from the indwelling Holy Spirit. Unless the Author of the Book, has regenerated you, unless He is dwelling in you, it is impossible for you to handle this Book properly.

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This is the third great doctrine – the doctrine of the necessity of illumination of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. And this leads us on to the fourth great doctrine concerning Scripture.

And that is the doctrine of the proper interpretation of Scripture. The proper interpretation of Scripture. And we can put the doctrine in three words: "Scripture interprets Scripture." Scripture interprets Scripture. Notice verse 13 – "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, notice, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" – literally, "comparing things from the Spirit with things from the Spirit" – in other words, comparing Scripture with Scripture.

And Paul expounds this doctrine both negatively and positively. We are not to think that the Bible is human wisdom. We are to compare things from the Spirit with things from the Spirit, in other words, compare Scripture with Scripture. Let Scripture be its own interpreter – by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Now – based on what we have seen thus far, what are the implications of these four doctrines – revelation, inspiration, the necessity of illumination, and the key to proper interpretation? What are the implications of these four doctrines in our own handling of Scripture as individuals and as the church of Jesus Christ? I'd like to suggest five of them to you.

First, we need to treat the Bible as one Book. We've already mentioned this. We must treat the Bible as a supernatural Book, always. The only supernatural Book.

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And therefore, we must treat it as a Book written by a single Author, God Himself, always. "All Scripture is God-breathed" – all of it, every bit of it, without exception. There is no mingling of the holy and the profane in Scripture. It is all holy. It is all from God. There is no mingling of the errant and the inerrant. It is all inerrant.

And therefore, we must treat it as a Book revealing a system of truth that is unified – God speaks with one voice – "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Psalm 119:160).

And therefore, we need to remember that this system of revealed truth is progressive. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and the New Testament is God's own commentary on the Old Testament.

And because these things are true, therefore, we must always work from the general to the particular. The Bible is one Book. It reveals one Mind, and one system of doctrine. And so, we must always work from these general principles to the particular consideration of any book or passage within the Bible. That is our starting point in understanding the meaning of any passage of Scripture.

That is the first implication, on the positive side. There is also a second and corresponding negative implication. The negative side is this: We must never rely on the unbelieving world to tell us what the Bible means. We've already talked about this in relation to the purpose-driven church philosophy, but I believe we cannot emphasize it enough. What the unbelieving world will tell us about the Bible, at its very, very best, is going to be some truth mixed with a great deal of serious error.

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We must never rely on the unbelieving world to tell us what the Bible means. We've already talked about this, but I believe we cannot emphasize it enough. What the unbelieving world will tell us about the Bible, at its very, very best, is going to be some truth mixed with a great deal of serious error.

Recently I was in my car, and I turned on the radio and came across a man who was preaching about the temptation of our Lord by Satan in the wilderness. And during the first fifteen minutes that I listened, this minister said some very good things. He laid down some Biblically sound principles for dealing with temptation.

But then in the last few minutes he got way off the track. First, he denied the deity of Christ. He made it clear that he believed that Jesus was merely our great human example. He did not believe that Jesus Christ is God Himself. And then, the man said that Christians are able to resist temptation because they receive the Holy Spirit at their baptism.

Now, those two teachings lead people to Hell. They make people think that all they need to do to get to Heaven is to be baptized and lead a good moral life. Well, I found out at the end of the program that this was a minister from a liberal church, so what he said was very much to be expected. But it demonstrates the fact that we must never rely on the unbelieving world to tell us what the Bible means. And often the voice of the unbelieving world stands behind a pulpit. This man was a minister, but he was a natural man, an unsaved man, and therefore he was totally unqualified to

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have anything to say about the Bible. Be careful who you listen to on the radio. Be careful who you watch on television. Be careful what you read.

And even when you hear or read a man you know to be reliable, be Bereans. Every preacher is a fallible human being. The Berean believers in the book of Acts didn't even take the word of the Apostle Paul on its own. They went home, and checked out what he said, to see if it was true. And where did they go to check it out? They searched the Scriptures. And they weren't out to be critical. They weren't out to have roast preacher for lunch every Sunday. They simply wanted to make sure that everything they were hearing agreed with their supreme authority – the written Word of God.

And no Gospel minister worthy of the name should ever object if you want to check what he says from the pulpit, in the Bible, for yourself. He should never be unwilling to answer honest questions. A godly pastor is one who believes that God's Word is the ultimate authority for both the preacher and the people.