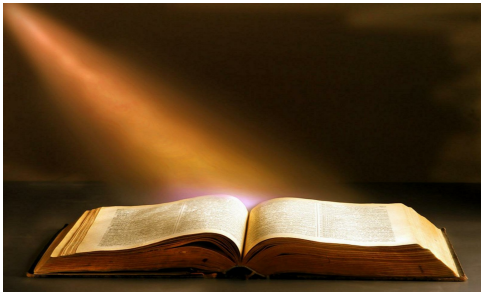


Illumination of the Bible



Open my eyes that I may behold
Wonderful things from Your law.
- Psalm 119:18

ILLUMINATION OF THE BIBLE BY THE SPIRIT WHO INSPIRED THE BIBLE

THE BIBLE & ILLUMINATION – To illuminate means to have something brightened with light and made clear to the eyes. Figuratively, **illumination** can mean to be enlightened spiritually. Simply put, **illumination** in the spiritual sense is “turning on the light.” The Source of spiritual **illumination** is the Father, the Channel is the Holy Spirit and the supreme Goal is that He shine “in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2Cor 4:6+) While some might say this is a bit too mystical, it is thoroughly Biblical. Indeed, **illumination** is something we should pray for even as Paul prayed for the saints at Ephesus asking that “the eyes of (their) heart (the core of one’s being) be enlightened, so that (they) may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what is the surpassing (Gk - exceedingly extraordinary) greatness of His power (dunamis - inherent supernatural power to live a supernatural life = “Resurrection power” - Eph 1:20+) toward us who believe.” (Eph 1:18-19+) Paul was not praying for new revelation, but for spiritual illumination of truth they already knew. And that is our desperate need, every time we open the Book we should beg God: “Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Your Law.” (Ps 119:18+). As D L Moody said, Spirit led “study of God’s Word brings peace to the heart. In it, we find a light for every darkness, life in death, the promise of our Lord’s return, and the assurance of everlasting glory.” This begs a question - Every time you open the Book, do you ask the Author of the Book to open your heart to receive the truth from His Book? If you do, you can rest assured that with God’s Word as your map and His Spirit as your compass, you are sure to stay on course. “Oh, that Thy words, like the beams of the sun, may enter through the window of my understanding, and dispel the darkness of my mind!” (Spurgeon)

I scanned the Scriptures thoughtlessly—
My haste had closed my ear;
Then prayerfully I read once more—
This time my heart could hear.
--Gustafson

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit and the Holy Word operate together. As Puritan Stephen Charnock wrote “The Word is the chariot of the Spirit, the Spirit the Guider of the Word.” Jesus promised His disciples that “when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” (Jn 16:13) Hallelujah, He has come and now indwells all His children, Paul explaining that “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” (Ro 8:9+) Paul also taught that “the natural (unregenerate) man cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” (1Cor 2:14+) In contrast believers have received “the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” (1Cor 2:12+) John wrote that we “have an anointing from the Holy One” (1Jn 2:20+), going on to explain that “the anointing which you received from Him abides in you (the indwelling Spirit 1Cor 6:19), and you have no need for anyone to teach you.” (1Jn 2:27+) John is not saying we don’t need teachers (Eph 4:11+; Acts 13:1+), but wants us to understand that each believer is capable and responsible to study the Word for themselves, because the Spirit Who inspired the Scriptures, has anointed and indwelt every believer. As Alexander Maclaren said “He who has the Holy Spirit in his heart and the Scriptures in his hands has all he needs.” O blessed holy book, the Bible, for there is no other book wherein the Author Who wrote it is always present with you, ever ready to explain what He wrote! Spurgeon agrees that “If you do not understand a book by a departed writer you are unable to

ask him his meaning, but the Spirit, Who inspired Holy Scripture, lives forever, and He delights to open the Word to those who seek His instruction."

*It is better to live one verse of the Bible,
than to recite an entire chapter.*

- Jesus in John 13:17

Spurgeon reminds us that "God, by His Spirit, brings old truth home to the heart, gives new light to our eyes, and causes the Word to exercise new power over us." **Warren Wiersbe** adds that "Illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit, and we must depend on Him to teach us new truths and to remind us of truths we may have forgotten (Jn 14:26b). When (we are) "in the Spirit," (see locative of sphere, see Praying in the Spirit) (Rev 1:10+) the Word comes forth with power and penetration. We experience what the little girl in London meant when she said to her mother, "Mother, is Mr. Spurgeon speaking to *me*?" (Of course he was speaking to the entire congregation, but she perceived his words were personally for her. So too with the blessed Holy Spirit!) We have an idiom that says "[don't take it personally](#)"! [Au contraire](#), we should take it personally when it is the Word spoken by God! The Word becomes personal....The blessing doesn't come because we hear the Word; it comes because we do the Word (Lk 8:21+). Anything else is pure deception. (Jas 1:22+)" Indeed, it is better to *live* one verse of the Bible, than to *recite* an entire chapter. As Jesus taught "If you **know** these things, you are blessed if you **do** them." (Jn 13:17)

*When the Spirit of God hovers
and the Word of God speaks,
order comes out of chaos.*

-Tony Evans on Ge 1:2+

Order or Chaos? - **Tony Evans** observes that "In **revelation**, God discloses His truth. Through **inspiration**, He sees that it is recorded for us. And by the **illumination** of His Spirit, He enables us to understand and apply it. When you get all of this working in your life, you're going to grow as a follower of Christ! (1Pe 2:2+, 2Pe 3:18+) In Genesis 1:2+ the Spirit hovered over "the surface of the waters." In Genesis 1:3+ God said, "Let there be light." Light was not present until the Spirit of God hovered. Why is that important? When the Spirit of God hovers and the Word of God speaks, order comes out of chaos. That's what happened in creation. The earth was "formless and void" before the Spirit and the light came (Ge 1:2+). Does your life ever feel formless and void? Ever feel empty, chaotic in your life? Guess how you move from chaos to order? You do so when the holy Word is mixed with the hovering Spirit. That's not just reading your Bible. That's asking God to illumine what you read and submitting your heart to it. Then God's Spirit brings order out of chaos." (See his discussion of "**The Concept of Illumination**" in his book [What Matters Most: Four Absolute Necessities in Following Christ](#) - also read the section on Illumination in Evans' book [The Wonder of the Word: Hearing the Voice of God in Scripture](#))

The psalmist echoes this truth writing "The unfolding (unveiling giving understanding) of Thy Words gives light. It gives understanding to the simple." (Ps 119:130+) The Spirit's illuminating work is not to change the *sense* of the Scriptures, but to restore us to our *senses* so that we can grasp the intended *sense* of the Scriptures!

"Do you have an illuminated Bible?"

-- C H Spurgeon

Illuminated Bibles? - In a sermon on the Holy Spirit, Spurgeon asked "Do any of you have an illuminated Bible? "No," says one, "I have a morocco Bible," or "I have a marginal reference Bible." Ah! that is all very well, but have you an illuminated Bible? "Yes, I have a large family Bible with pictures in it." Yes, but have you an illuminated Bible? "I don't understand what you mean by an illuminated Bible." Well, it is the Christian man who has an illuminated Bible. He does not buy it illuminated originally, but when he reads it – "A glory gilds the sacred page, Majestic like the sun, Which gives a light to every page, It gives, but burrows (hides) none." "There is nothing like reading an illuminated Bible, beloved. You may read to all eternity, and never learn anything by it, unless it is illuminated by the Spirit; and then the words shine forth like stars. The book seems made of gold leaf; every single letter glitters like a diamond. Oh! it is a blessed thing to read an illuminated Bible lit up by the radiance of the Holy Spirit. Hast thou read the Bible and studied it, my brother, and yet have thine eyes been unenlightened? Go and say, "O Lord, gild (overlay with gold) the Bible for me. I want an expounded Bible. Illuminate it; shine upon it; for I cannot read it to profit, unless Thou enlighten me." Blind men may read the Bible with their fingers, but blind souls cannot. We want a light to read the Bible by; there is no reading it in the dark. Thus the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth, by suggesting ideas, by directing our thoughts, and by illuminating the Scriptures when we read them." (Read [The Holy Spirit Your Teacher](#)) "Open my eyes, that I may see, Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key, That shall unclasp, and set me free." (Scott)

ILLUSTRATION - **Parakeet or Paraclete?** - Jesus promised His disciples (and us) "the Helper (Gk - Paraclete), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name and He will teach you all things." (Jn 14:26) M R DeHaan tells the story of visiting a retired pastor who had a parakeet named Gibby who would say things like "Gibby is the prettiest bird in all the world" without any

understanding of what he was actually saying. Many Christians go through the motions of Bible reading without the slightest idea of the true meaning of the text. It is better to read one verse in prayerful dependence on your "Paraclete (Helper), than to rattle off a whole book from memory like a parakeet! We would all do well to ask the question Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch "Do (I) understand what (I) am reading?" (Acts 8:30+) – "Ever-present, truest Friend; Ever near Thine aid to lend; Guide us as we search the Word, Make it both our shield and sword."

Problem With the Signal? - Tony Evans writes that "Before cable television came into my neighborhood, I used a television antenna. I had a workman come out one time because I was having problems with my reception. He said, "Your signal is strong, but your antenna is not pointed in the right direction." The Word of God is strong. There's no problem with the "signal." But our heart's antenna is often not pointed in the right direction. A lot of us are fiddling with our lives trying to fix them when the problem is that our spiritual antenna is not pointed toward God. Therefore, we cannot pick up the Spirit's signal." (See [The Wonder of the Word](#))

John Piper - Our approach to the Bible should be like a miser in the gold rush, or a fiancée who has lost her engagement ring somewhere in the house. She ransacks the house. That is the way we seek for God in the Bible....Praying cannot replace reading. Praying may turn reading into seeing. But if we don't read, we will not see. The Holy Spirit is sent to glorify Jesus, and the glory of Jesus is portrayed in the Word. Read. Rejoice that you can read....Spiritual apprehension is a gift of God....Don't replace thinking with praying. Think and pray. Pray and think. (2 Timothy 2:7+) (Read the full discussion of [Wonderful Things from Your Word](#) - the first section deals with *Our Desperate Need for God's Illumination*).

*Many books can inform,
but only a Spirit illuminated Bible can transform!*

- Paul in 2Cor 3:18+

ILLUSTRATION of the Travesty of Information without Illumination (or [Regeneration](#))! - A seminary professor visiting the Holy Lands met a man who claimed to have memorized the entire Old Testament in Hebrew! Needless to say, the astonished professor asked for a demonstration. "Where shall we begin"? asked the man. The professor who was an avid student of the psalms replied "Psalm 1." So for two hours the man effortlessly and flawlessly recited the Psalms from memory as the professor sat in stunned silence. When the demonstration was over, the professor discovered something even more astonishing about the man-he was an atheist! Here was a man who intellectually could go through the Scriptures, but without the Spirit's illumination the Scriptures never once went through him! Richard Lenski commented that "For all spiritual things, our thinking abilities, however keen and sharp, are not sufficient. The Lord must control, guide, enlighten our understanding." Many books can inform, but only a Spirit illuminated Bible can transform! (2Cor 3:18+)

Intellect and Illumination - Paul understood our need to couple intellect and illumination exhorting Timothy to "Consider (seek to intellectually grasp the meaning = Our Responsibility) what I say, for the Lord (the Spirit) will give you understanding (God's Promised Provision) in everything." (2Ti 2:7+) John Piper explains that "So many people swerve off the road to one side of this verse or the other. Some stress, **"Think over what I say."** They emphasize the indispensable role of reason and thinking. And they minimize the decisive supernatural role of the Spirit in making the mind able to see and embrace the truth. Others stress the second half of the verse: **"for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."** They emphasize the futility of reason without the Spirit's illumining work. But Paul will not be divided that way. (We must) embrace both human thinking and divine illumination. For Paul, it was not either-or but both-and. If God does not open our eyes, we will not see the wonder of the Word. We are not naturally able to see spiritual beauty. When we read the Bible without the help of the Holy Spirit, the glory of God in the teachings and events of the Bible is like the sun shining in the face of a blind man. (We must be) desperate for God and hungry for God, and this must set us to pleading and crying out to God for His help in reading the Bible. We must pray for it—"Open my eyes." (Ps 119:18-note) And if we would stay alive in God and be real and authentic and intense in our love for Him, we must be desperate to have this enabling every day. So pray, pray, pray." May we daily be like the psalmist who declared "I rise before dawn and cry for help. I wait for Your Words. O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Ps 119:147, 97)

ILLUSTRATION - Tender Heart - Without a heart for God, we cannot hear God's Word. Proper understanding of spiritual truth is not dependent on a keen intellect but on a tender heart, a heart that is "humble and contrite of spirit, and which trembles at My Word." (Isa 66:2) We don't as much need physical eyes to read the Bible, as we need the spiritual eyes of our heart enlightened to love the Author. The story is told of a poor, blind French girl who obtained a Braille copy of Mark and learned to read it with her fingers. But eventually her fingers became so calloused she could no longer distinguish letters and words. In desperation for the Word, she cut the calluses in an attempt to restore the sense of touch, but sadly the scarring had the opposite effect. Faced with the reality that she must give up her beloved Book, with weeping she pressed the Braille copy of Mark to her lips, lamenting "Farewell, farewell, sweet Word of my Heavenly Father!" To her surprise, she discovered that her lips were even more sensitive to touch than her fingers had been! And from that moment on she "read" the Bible with her lips, and doubtless offered praises like the psalmist who cried "Let my lips utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes." (Ps 119:171)

May our prayer ever be...**Open My Eyes, That I May See** - [Play this hymn by Clara H Scott](#) (or even better pray this hymn!)

Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp, and set me free.

Refrain:

*Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see:
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Savior divine!*

Open my ears, that I may hear
Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
Ev'rything false will disappear.

Refrain

Open my mouth, and let me bear
Gladly the warm truth ev'rywhere;
Open my heart, and let me prepare
Love with Thy children thus to share.

Refrain

ILLUSTRATION - **C H Spurgeon** gives a great illustration of our desperate, constant need of the Holy Spirit to open our natural eyes to supernatural truth...The Spirit guiding into all truth - Truth may be compared to some cave or grotto, with wondrous stalactites hanging from the roof, and others starting from the floor; a cavern glittering with spar and abounding in marvels. Before entering the cavern you inquire for a guide, who comes with his lighted flambeau. He conducts you down to a considerable depth, and you find yourself in the midst of the cave. He leads you through different chambers. Here he points you to a little stream rushing from amid the rocks, and indicates its rise and progress; there he points to some peculiar rock and tells you its name, then takes you into a large natural hall, tells you how many persons once feasted in it, and so on. Truth is a grand series of caverns, it is our glory to have so great and wise a Conductor as the Holy Spirit. Imagine that we are coming to the darkness of it. He is a light shining in the midst of us to guide us. And by the light He shows us wondrous things. He teaches us by suggestion, direction, and illumination.

The Spirit of Truth by Brad Klassen (an excerpt)

A vital component is often missing in books about the Christian mind. Writers emphasize the requirement of conversion to Christ, the uniqueness of the Christian view of truth and authority, the importance of disciplined thinking, the necessity of worldview discernment, and the value of life-long learning. But often treated as an afterthought is the role the Holy Spirit plays in the development and exercise of the kind of thinking that is truly Christian. As with many other aspects of life in the church, Christians are tempted to believe that “thinking” and “the intellect” are predominantly a reflection of the efforts of man—even the regenerate man.

This neglect of the Spirit’s role in the development of the Christian mind can be traced to numerous causes. There is a fear of fanaticism for some. The Charismatic movement has so warped the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that many would rather avoid the topic altogether. For others, the Holy Spirit is seen as the energizer of moral living and not of the mind. Still others have never been challenged to search the Scriptures to see what they really teach about the Spirit and His ministries to the believer. They assume that the Bible is largely silent on this issue, or that God’s will is that believers do not dwell upon it. In any case, the neglect of this doctrine not only leaves the believer ignorant of Scripture’s teaching and unappreciative of the Spirit’s ministry, but this neglect also leads to an unhealthy state of the mind itself.

If Christians are to think Christianly, they must consider the Holy Spirit’s role in this duty. After all, the Scriptures distinctly teach that the Holy Spirit is the agent of truth and of knowing. So important is this reality that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” three times in His Upper Room discourse (John 13–16) to encourage His disciples as He prepared them for His departure and their future ministries:

- John 14:15–17 (esp. v. 17)
- John 15:26–27 (esp. v. 26)

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

Years after Jesus’s ascension, the Apostle Paul described how Jesus’ promise to the apostles about the Holy Spirit was being fulfilled. The “Spirit of truth” was active in the apostles and New Testament writers, revealing to them the mysterious “depths of God” that no one could otherwise ever know, and aiding them in the communication of that knowledge to others:

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. 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. 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, 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.”

The unique truth-revealing work of the Holy Spirit described by these texts is summarized by two important terms: revelation and inspiration. Revelation refers to the disclosure of divine knowledge to the apostles; inspiration refers to the correct articulation of that knowledge in the form of human language by the apostles. But there remains a third term that relates to the Spirit’s work as “the Spirit of truth”: **illumination**. ([Click for full article](#) and [click here for audio](#))

QUESTION - [What is the biblical doctrine of illumination?](#)

ANSWER - Simply put, illumination in the spiritual sense is “turning on the light” of understanding in some area. Throughout the ages, people in every culture and religion have claimed some kind of revelation or enlightenment from God (whether true or not). When that enlightenment deals with new knowledge or future things, we call it prophecy. When that enlightenment deals with understanding and applying knowledge already given, we call it illumination. Regarding illumination of the latter type, the question arises, “How does God do it?”

The most basic level of enlightenment is the knowledge of sin, and without that knowledge, everything else is pointless. Psalm 18:28 says, “You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.” Psalm 119, which is the longest chapter in the Bible, is a song about God’s Word. In verse 130, it says “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” This verse establishes the basic method of God’s illumination. When God’s Word enters the heart of a person, it gives light and understanding to them. For this reason, we are repeatedly told to study the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Verses 98 and 99 say “Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.”

Regular study of the Word of God will give direction and understanding in the issues of life. This is the first method of God’s illumination and the starting point for us all. In Psalm 119 we also find another type of God’s illumination. Verse 18 says, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” These are not new revelations, but things which have been written and revealed long before, and just now understood by the reader (one of those “aha!” moments). Similarly, verse 73 says, “Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.” The plea is for personal understanding and application of God’s laws as they are studied by the individual. Fifteen times in this psalm, God is asked to teach or give understanding regarding His laws.

One passage that sometimes stirs controversy regarding illumination is John 14:26, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the upper room, giving them last instructions before His death. This special group of men was to be responsible for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world. They had spent three and a half years with Him, watching His miracles and hearing His teachings. They would relay those things to the rest of the world, and would need God’s special help remembering those things accurately. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach them and remind them of what had been said, so they could give it to others (including the writing of the Gospels). This verse does not teach that the Spirit will do so with all believers (though there are other verses that speak of the Spirit’s illuminating work).

What is the Holy Spirit’s illuminating work in believers? Ephesians 1:17-18 tells us that the Spirit gives wisdom and revelation concerning Jesus Christ, and opens the eyes of understanding so we can know God’s purposes in our lives. In 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, God has revealed His plans for us by His Spirit, who teaches us spiritual things. The context here points to the Word of God as that which has been revealed. The Spirit of God will always point us to the Word of God for our instruction. As Jesus told His disciples in John 16:12-15, the Spirit simply repeats what the Father and the Son have already said. This repetition helps us

remember and fully hear what God has already told us. Sometimes we have to hear things several times before we actually hear them. That's where the Spirit comes in.

One thing that is sometimes overlooked in the discussion of illumination is the purpose of it. To hear some arguments, it would seem that the whole purpose of illumination is an accurate and academic understanding of God's Word. There is no question that God desires us to accurately understand what He has given us. Words have meaning, and we must pay attention to the details in those words. If, however, we stop there, we simply have an academic understanding of facts or philosophies, which do no one any good.

Going back to Psalm 119, we find purpose statements connected with the illumination verses. "I will meditate on your wonders" (v. 27), "I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart" (v. 34), "that I may understand your statutes" (v. 125), "that I may live" (v. 144). The illumination always points to action. Why does God help us understand His Word? So we are able to live in its light. First John 1:6 challenges us, "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth." We could paraphrase it to say, "If we say we've been enlightened, but still walk in the dark, we lie about understanding God's Word." The Spirit of God, who enlightens us to hear and understand God's Word, then takes that knowledge and guides us in living it. Romans 8:14 says "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The illuminating and leading work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is a confirmation that we are indeed children of God.GotQuestions.org

Related Resources:

- Ephesians 1:18-19 Commentary
- Psalm 119:18 Commentary
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 Commentary
- 2 Timothy 2:7 Commentary
- [Illumination I](#) J. Vernon McGee very brief audio - McGee delights in how limitless the voice of the Spirit in the Bible is. Not even great Bible scholars can discover these treasures in a whole lifetime.
- [Illumination II](#) J. Vernon McGee - 24 minute audio