



# Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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## Negative Fruits of the Doctrine of Illumination

By

Jackie M. Stearsman

When we accept false concepts or ideas we will be hindered in our quest for truth. Every truth we learn and apply will serve to increase the knowledge we possess as well as advance the learning process.

All who accept the Bible as true must respect the need to justify all conclusions by properly handling the Word of Truth, for to do otherwise is to stand condemned by the Bible (I Thess. 5:22; I Pet. 3:15; John 8:30; 3:19-21; Acts 17:11; II Tim. 2:15, II Pet. 3:15-18)

### Illumination Defined

Illumination is *a theological term used to express the manner in which the Holy Spirit makes clear to man the Word of God, whether preached or in written form. Without an illumination of the Holy Scriptures, no man can understand God's divine, infallible revelation because Spiritual things are only Spiritually—i.e., by the aid of the Holy Spirit—understood or discerned (I Cor 4:11-14; Jn 16:13). (Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, I, 831).*

There are a number of assertions here that must be kept in mind: (1) that the individual possessing "illumination" is being directed by the Holy Spirit; (2) that

this individual is to have, because of this direction, a clear understanding of the Word of God; (3) that without this "illumination" the Word of God cannot be understood; (4) by implication, that if anyone misunderstands the Word of God, it is God's fault, for his Word can be understood only when his Spirit "illuminates."

It should be understood that this idea of "illumination" is quite common and is at the heart of much confusion in the religious world. Rather than study the Bible and conclude from it their positions religiously, men often, when shown that their positions have no basis Biblically, will say, "The Spirit has led me to believe this and the Spirit has led you to believe the very opposite, and that is just the way it is." How can this be since the Bible clearly affirms that the Spirit is a Spirit of truth and not of error (John 15:26; 16:13)? When teaching and doctrine contradict the teaching and doctrine of the Bible it may not be properly charged to the Spirit of truth (II Pet. 3:15-18; Gal. 1:6-12; 5:7-9).

### Biblical Enlightenment

*The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream, and he that hath my word, let him speak my*

*word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer*

*that breaketh the rock in pieces? . . . Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them, not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord. (Jer. 23:28-32).*

There are a number of things to consider relative to the passage: (1) Some who assert that God has directed them, assert a lie.

(2) The Word of God is to sit in judgement on all assertions. (3) That which is false can be, should be, and must be, refuted by that which is true. (4) The Lord is opposed to any and all individuals who teach that which is contrary to, and without justification by, his Word. (5) Those who teach that which is not authorized by the Bible are doing harm to people.

Men need to understand how God (Christ) expects them to be enlightened spiritually. If they do



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not, there will be no way to know when truth has been followed.

### 1. Jesus the True Light

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the true light--that he came into the world to bring light and to expel darkness (John 1:1-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5). It is by this light that fellowship with God is to be maintained (I John 1:1-10; 2:1-6). Paul teaches that Jesus Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel and that he was "appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (II Tim. 1:10-11).

### 2. Place of the Apostles

Informed students of the Bible know that Jesus did not personally write the Bible but authorized the apostles to be the inspired recipients of that sacred truth recorded in the New Testament. The teaching by which the early Christians were directed is called the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

Advocates of the illumination theory commit a grievous error when they attribute to modern man what was promised the inspired apostles and writers of the New Testament. The following verses were directed to the apostles and not to every Christian.

*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26-27). Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13). Again, But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you*

*all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).*

The apostles, being so inspired, wrote the New Testament, or supervised its writing, and this is what gives it its authority and reliability (Matt. 10:40-42). To the apostles Jesus said: *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me (Luke 10:16).*

### 3. Bible Is Complete

As a result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the message of the apostles is perfect, complete, all-sufficient and authoritative. Through this knowledge God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, enabling us to understand what to do to ensure His favor and to enter the portals of heaven, providing we remember what the inspired message teaches and obey it (II Pet. 1:21-21). The Inspired Word will make us wise unto salvation and furnish us completely unto all good works (II Tim. 3:14-17).

### 4. Bible to Be Understood

#### By Non-Christians

Three thousand non-Christian Jews heard the inspired lesson of Peter, requested to know what to do to be saved, were told by Peter what to do, did it, and they were added to the church that day upon their baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2). The non-Christian Samaritans heard the Spirit-directed message of Philip and were likewise baptized (Acts 8). The non-Christian Cornelius heard the inspired Apostle Peter, believed what he heard, and was commanded to be baptized, as were those of Acts 2 (Acts 10:1-48). The non-Christian Lydia heard the message of Paul, had her heart opened by the Lord in so doing, and obeyed the same gospel (Acts 16). The non-Christian, Athenians heard the Apostle Paul, and most of them

rejected his message but a few did accept it. The ones who rejected it did so of their own free will just as those who became obedient believers did so of their own free will (Acts 17).

The Bible clearly and forcefully declares that uninspired man may, and ought to, understand and obey the revealed truths recorded in the Bible. The Bible teaches also why some men do not (John 3:19-21).

### 5. Bible to Be Understood By the Christian

This is evident from the fact that the letters were written to the early Christians, who were expected to implement its truths (Col. 4:16; Rev. 2-3). The words of Paul are clear--the revelation was given to Paul and he wrote expecting what he wrote to be read and understood (Eph. 3:3-4). Anyone rejecting what Paul wrote was to know that he was rejecting God (I Cor. 14:37-38).

### Negative Fruits

Men must not be taught that they cannot understand the Bible. They need to be shown that they can and must understand God's will if they are to be blessed by him (Luke 2:32; John 3:19-21; Acts 13:46-52; 26:14-29).

### 1. Hinders Bible Study

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Editor: Jackie M. Stearsman

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When men are told that they cannot understand the Bible, their incentive to study is destroyed. Even if one did study, without a direct "illumination" by God (as per the theory) he could not trust what he had concluded. How could anything be more discouraging and hindering to Bible study.

### 2. Hinders Logical Thought

When men are taught that the Holy Spirit provides "clear" understanding to the ones "illuminated" and when all manner of contradictions are presented as "truth," individuals have no proper incentive to prove what they believe and oppose what is false (I Thess. 5:21-22). Objective, verifiable, demonstrative truth is replaced with subjectivity.

### 3. Promotes Divison

The divided state of the Christian religion is a fruit of individuals appealing to subjectivism. Minds have been saturated with the idea that some "inner witness" or "inner light" has made them superior interpreters of the Bible. When shown division is contrary to true enlightenment, it does not register (I Cor. 1:10). "Illumination" permits the violation of revealed truth.

### 4. Promotes False Security

The Bible teaches that truth is essential for freedom (John 8:31-32). To go beyond what is written and authorized by the teaching of the New Testament is to stand condemned by God (I Cor. 4:6; II John 9-11; Gal. 2:11-14). To appeal to "illumination" to justify that which contradicts the Bible and is not authorized by it is to promise security where God does not.

### 5. Promotes Cultism

It is common to hear from cultic leaders a claim to being provided with special insight. With a religious society saturating the general public with the idea of a need for "illumination" before they

can, understand the Bible, the groundwork is prepared for such false claims. Only objective truth, known and taught, can refute these false religious ideas (Jer. 23:25-32).

### 6. Faults God

When it is asserted that the Bible can be understood only when God provides the illumination, then it is also implied that all false teaching or improper understanding is due to God--if God would but provide the "illumination," there would be a "clear" understanding of his Word.

### Conclusion

The writer makes no claim for special supernatural enlightenment apart from that which is given to all men equally by diligent study of the Bible. We do claim that what we teach is true, and that you, like the Bereans of old (Acts 17:11), may take your Bible, understand what it teaches without any so-called "illumination," and know if what we have taught is true or false (Psalm 119:104-105, 63; II Pet. 2:2; 3:15-18).

Man must have the proper mind-set if he understands anything, and the Bible is no different. With no spiritual interest and a mind refusing spiritual truth, ignorance is predictable (Rom. 8:5-8; I Cor. 2:11-14). Jesus teaches that if any man wills to know the truth, he can know it (John 7:17; 8:31-32; 17:17).

Aubrey D. Vann

## Memorial

July 17, 2001

Mr. Aubrey E. Vann  
Tucson, AZ

Dear Mr. Vann,

Thank you for your donation of \$5,000.00 to the Florida School of

Preaching as requested by your father. He was a supporter of the school from the beginning, we appreciate his remembering us in his will.

This donation will make it possible to purchase WordPerfect Office for the 10 Computers in our Computer Lab and a permanent acknowledgment of this will be placed in the Lab.

We had several donations from members of the church in memory of him but didn't send you an acknowledgment because we didn't have your address. We want the next of kin to know the deceased has been remembered by his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jackie M. Stearsman, Director



## From the Field

July 6, 2001

Columbia, South Carolina

Hello Jackie,

How are you doing "these" days? I hope, trust and pray that all is well with you. . . .

Building up the church from "scratch" is hard work! It is hard to believe that next month will be five years since this work begun. The Lord has truly taught me patience through it all.

I received your letter requesting financial support for the school. I have been talking to the brethren here to remember the school in that regard along with much prayer. I have been also encouraging men to attend the school. One guy is a brother named \_\_\_\_\_ out of Jacksonville, Florida. He has been a Christian since 1983. He and I talked for a good while over the phone last week. He is a good brother that is humble and loves God. I would truly recommend him as a student. I will let you know what happens as a result of our future conversations.

As you may know James

Burford joined our staff last month to serve as the assistant minister. He is still adjusting to being here in Columbia, South Carolina, getting to know the different church members names and getting an idea of the many "dealings" of ministry. He and I work very well together, that's truly a blessing. He stayed at my house the first month he was here. Now he has his own place. We still worship in a rented facility (Trenholm Park). James chose to reside near that location, so his apartment is in walking distance of the place where we worship. He has been getting more opportunities to preach. The congregation loves him.

We have a lot going on in the area, We are aiding in starting another congregation about an hour from us. The Rembert Church of Christ began last month and already people are responding to the preaching of the gospel in that small town. This little town has the population of about 3,000 people and there was no church of Christ there. Thanks be to God, there is now a congregation of God's people

there. Amen.

On the 19th of this month I will be going up to Wilson, North Carolina to preach in a meeting at the Wilson Church of Christ. I look forward to going up there and being with the church again. I was there during the earlier part of this year and was able to meet, teach and baptize a lady into Christ. Bernard Cooper is from Wilson, North Carolina. Matter of fact, Bernard's brother attends that congregation in Wilson. The preacher's name there is David Carter.

Our Gospel Meeting will run from August 19th-24th. Last year we had over 350 people to attend. We spent many days praying and going "house to house" to invite our families, friends and neighbors to hear the preaching of the gospel. It was so exciting to see the turn out that we saw last year. This year we hope to see even more come to hear the hope that is IN CHRIST. Last year we had to rent the Carolina Stadium Center (right next to the University of South Carolina/ Gamecock Stadium). That place was nice but it also cost a pretty

penny to rent. The facility that we worship in was under construction, that is why we had to rent a place big enough to hold the crowd that we expected. The facility that we rent recently was completed. We hope to be able to resume getting about 400 chairs from the Fort Jackson Military Base to have the Gospel Meeting this year.

Jackie, I would like to know what you think. We are presently in a building program. Granted we have only been around about 5 years. We have a membership now of 100. Our average Sunday morning attendance is between 70 to 90. The question that constantly comes up is "what seating capacity should we build the building to seat"? We have had some say as low as 100 to as high as 500. . . .

Take good care of yourself my brother in the Lord.

Sincerely,  
An+hony Weeks



Fall Semester begins August 20, 2001

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FLORIDA SCHOOL OF PREACHING  
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