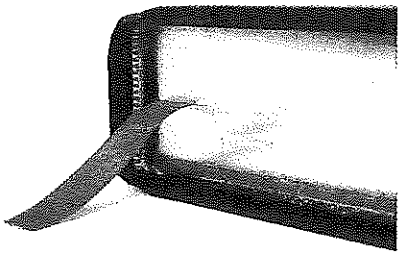


The Spirit's Illumination Ministry



Topic

Illumination

Theme

God gives each believer the Holy Spirit to guide in understanding the Bible.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will be diligent in giving the Holy Spirit an opportunity to illuminate the Scriptures and thereby transform his life.

Materials

- Resource 7

Scripture Focus

Gen. 3:8; John 20:30, 31; Rom. 1:18–32; 1 Cor. 2:9–16; Eph. 4:18; 1 Tim. 2:3, 4; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 John 5:13

Summary

This lesson addresses God's purpose to communicate with humanity and the process He has set in place for that communication to take place. It also addresses the idea that humanity cannot know God's objective truth because every person has insurmountable limitations to interpreting Scripture.

Outline

I. God's Purpose Includes Communication

- A. God made people in His image
- B. God gave people His Word

II. God's Process for Communication

- A. The believer's job
- B. The Spirit's job

III. Man's Problem with Communication

- A. Man believes objectivity is impossible
- B. Man believes history is irrefutable

Memory Verse

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

GETTING STARTED

Text Check

Have learners search their text message logs on their phones for embarrassing or confusing typos.

ASK: How careful are you when you send a text message or post a message on Twitter?

ASK: Do you ever send follow-up edits to correct your mistakes? Why or why not?

This lesson is about communicating with God through His Word. We have already learned that God inspired His Word so that the message was recorded perfectly, unlike many of our text messages. The question is, can we successfully comprehend God's message to us? God's Word helps us answer that question. We will examine the evidence in this lesson.

What a Shuffle Might Tell

Want to know when someone is perhaps not telling the truth? Watch their feet. When under stress, people will increasingly move their feet since they are not concentrating on them. Instead, they are concentrating on their facial expressions and arm movement to convince you they are telling the truth. So when you see someone's feet fidgeting, shuffling, winding around a chair, or even making quick moves as if they are ready to run, then you have good reason to question whether the person is being honest.

ASK: When have you suspected someone was not telling you the truth? (Q1)

ASK: What tipped you off? (Q2)

While feet might be indicators of a person's honesty, they are by no means a sure test of truthfulness. At best they would only raise questions. Some people approach the Word of God with the same level of uncertainty. They think that we can't be exactly sure what the Bible teaches. This lesson will address God's plan to communicate His truth to believers today.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. God's Purpose Includes Communication

A. God made people in His image

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always communicated with One another because communication is an inseparable part of Their nature. And Their communication, in accordance with Their nature, is perfect; it is impossible for the members of the Godhead to miscommunicate.

READ: Genesis 1:26. **ASK:** What did the persons of the Godhead talk about in this verse? (Q3) *Making man.*

When Jesus came to earth, He continued to communicate with the Father. The Gospels give several examples of such communication.

READ: Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12. **ASK:** How important was it for Jesus to communicate to the Father? (Q4) *He made it a high priority in His life, even giving up sleep to spend time communicating with the Father.*

READ: Matthew 26:36–44. **ASK:** What did Jesus communicate to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane? (Q5) *He communicated the sorrowfulness of His soul, His desire to have the cup of suffering pass from Him, and His perfect submission to the Father's will.*

God desired to also interact with His creation, so He purposefully designed Adam in His image. Being in the image of God meant in part that Adam had the ability to communicate effectively, especially before the Fall. Adam could comprehend what God said to him and then respond in a way that God fully understood.

God created man to ultimately glorify Him (Eph. 1:3–14, *to praise of his glory*). That overarching goal necessitates that humanity have a means of understanding God objectively and then communicating to God based on that objective knowledge (1 Cor. 10:31). To know God objectively is to understand Him for Who He actually is. It is a knowledge free of bias and prejudice. Conversely, *subjective* knowledge is based on a biased, internal reality and doesn't necessarily represent truth. Some theologians question whether humans can actually have unbiased, objective knowledge of God based on His self-revelation in the Bible. But God would not be satisfied with a creation that related to Him only on a misguided subjective level. He had to provide a means for humanity to know the truth about Him so they could fulfill their ultimate purpose of actually glorifying Him.

B. God gave people His Word

Apparently God was in the habit of walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before Adam sinned. For after the Fall, Adam and Eve hid from God in an attempt to avoid what we could assume was one of God's regular appearances in Eden (Gen. 3:8). That God communicated with Adam and Eve before and after the Fall is clear from the creation account (1:28–30; 3:9–19). The Fall did dramatically affect Adam and Eve's relationship with God. They were no longer in fellowship with Him. They became sinners whose hearts and minds were darkened (1 Cor. 2:14). As a result, they had to leave the Garden of Eden, the place of their sweet communion with God (Gen. 3:24).

ASK: What topics do you suppose Adam asked God about before the Fall ruined his fellowship with God? (Q6) *Perhaps God's nature and His purpose for His creation. No doubt Adam was also curious about how creation worked, including his own body and things like the sun, moon, and stars.*

Adam and Eve needed God's direction for life even before the Fall (Gen. 1:28–30), so God revealed truth to Adam and Eve. And although it would be centuries before Scripture was formally recorded, God continued to reveal Himself and His truth to humanity after the Fall so that they might put their faith in Him and glorify Him (Heb. 1:1–3). Ultimately God used people to record His special revelation. As we studied in lesson 5, that special revelation has survived through the centuries so that our Bibles today are rightfully called the Word of God. The testimony of the Bible is that God wants humanity to know Him and glorify Him (John 20:30, 31; 1 John 5:13). Those who refuse to put their faith in God and glorify Him are under His wrath. Paul wrote that those who observe God's creation are under condemnation for refusing to acknowledge God and glorify Him as creator (Rom. 1:18–32).

READ: Romans 10:14–17. **ASK:** What is God's solution to unbelief? (Q7) *God gave His Word so that humanity might hear it and put their faith in Him.*

God made His Word accessible. Those who hear or read the gospel message can understand its objective truth and respond to it by putting their faith in God (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). Once saved, the Word of God becomes a catalyst for the believer's spiritual growth (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:22–2:3).

But how can a believer ever really know that he is making proper sense of God's Word? How does he know when he has come to the right conclusions and has determined an accurate understanding for applying God's Word to his life?

II. God's Process for Communication

God has designed a process to help us understand His Word. He has not left us on our own in hopes that we might somehow stumble onto a truth every once and a while. We can know the objective truth of God's Word. But knowing God's truth is not something that just happens to us. It takes action on our part.

A. The believer's job

READ: 2 Timothy 2:15. **ASK:** What does God expect the believer to do in order to properly understand God's Word? (Q8) *He expects the believer to give diligent attention to studying God's Word.*

Paul fully expected Timothy, a young preacher, to study the Word to the point of having his work acceptable to God. In fact, he phrased his expectation as a command: *Study to show thyself approved unto God*. Paul wouldn't command Timothy to do something that was impossible to do.

Timothy was to be a *workman* in the things of God, rightly dividing the Word of truth. *Rightly divide* means to *cut a straight line*. The word is used in a number of secular contexts: of making a road, of plowing a furrow, of constructing a stone wall or building. Perhaps the primary allusion in Paul's mind was the word's use in tent-making, for that was his occupation. Tents were made of animal hides and not of huge sheets of nylon, such as we have today. Several animal hides had to be cut straight so that one would butt up straight against the other and they could be stitched together to make the tent.

Likewise, the workman of God is to cut straight when handling the Word of God.

Coming to the correct interpretation takes work and careful attention to detail. That process, called Bible study, will be the topic of discussion in lesson eight.

Resources like this manual help you as a teacher by providing you with a guide in presenting lessons. But don't neglect to consider the key passages on your own. Your lesson preparation should include thoughtful study so that you deliver God's truth from your heart.

That is, he is to interpret it correctly, understanding its various doctrines and seeing one Scripture in the light of other Scriptures so that all fits together into one harmonious whole. Many cults claim to base their teaching upon the Bible, but they isolate words or statements and give them a meaning which will not harmonize with the rest of the Bible. Then they produce a false teaching or cultic doctrine.

Today, the baseball is a perfect example of the importance of making sure two pieces of leather are lined up next to each other with no holes or overlaps. A pitcher must have a perfectly aligned baseball if his curve and slider are going to be effective. In the same way, a pastor needs to align the Scriptures as God intended if the Scriptures are going to be effective in his hands.

In order to rightly divide the Scriptures, Timothy needed to study. The word *study* means to *have diligence*, to *give haste*, or to *show eagerness*. It has been interpreted by the translators as *study* because the context is one of handling the Word. We ought to study it with diligence, not just when it happens to be convenient. We ought to study it with haste, not rushing through it but rushing to it. We ought to do it with eagerness and willingness. The results of such diligent study of the Word are correct understanding of its meaning and God's approval. God will examine the workman's work and declare it acceptable, or the workman will be put to shame.

The point we need to draw from Paul's instruction is that Timothy could actually teach and preach God's Word without being ashamed of having twisted and distorted its original meaning. He could preach and teach with confidence that he had interpreted and communicated God's Word as God intended. It is possible for us to do the same today. But diligent study of God's Word is needed.

So is accuracy in presenting God's Word based solely on the effort the teacher or preacher puts into the study? Is there another essential element in the process?

B. The Spirit's job

Diligent study of God's Word is only profitable because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's job is to illuminate the Scriptures so the one diligently studying them can understand them properly. As mentioned above, the Fall left humanity with a mind darkened by sin (Eph. 4:18). The Bible calls the sinner the *natural man* (1 Cor. 2:14).

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:14. **ASK:** What does the natural man, the unsaved person, conclude about the things of the Spirit of God? (Q9) *That they are foolishness.*

The Bible essentially makes no sense to the unsaved person. The scientific method cannot uncover its truths. Higher education cannot fathom it. Nor can the human senses grasp it (1 Cor. 2:9). It is not that the natural man is stupid; he simply lacks the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enlighten his mind to understand the *things of the Spirit of God*. The *things* refer to what the Holy Spirit reveals to the believer about God through His Word.

ASK: How would you respond to a believer who says he doesn't read the Bible because he doesn't understand it? (Q10) *Either he has never applied himself to actually study and meditate on the Word or he is not actually a believer.*

All believers have the Spirit in them and therefore have the potential to study and understand God's Word. Bible study is for all believers because of the Spirit's presence with them. The Spirit enlightens their minds to grasp God's objective truth so they know for certain what the Bible says. Paul states in summary: *We have the mind of Christ* (1 Cor. 2:16). As we study God's Word, the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our understanding. Our prayer should be: *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law* (Ps. 119:18).

ASK: Share a time when you experienced your understanding of God's Word being opened for you. What was your reaction? (Q11)

RESOURCE: Display resource 7 to summarize the believer's job and the Spirit's job in understanding Scripture.

We should note that the person who studies God's Word will experience the Spirit's illumination so long as his heart is prepared properly. The believer who is living with known, unconfessed sin or who is simply going through the motions of Bible study out of a sense of duty will most likely will not gain from the Spirit's illuminating ministry. The Word of God is powerful enough, however, to convict both the sinning and the dutiful believer (Heb. 4:12).

Given the Spirit's illuminating ministry, why might anyone think that people cannot go to the Bible and be assured of objective truth? On what do they base their reasoning?

III. Man's Problem with Communication

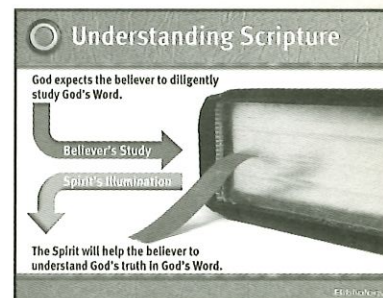
A. Man believes objectivity is impossible

Skeptics question whether a person is even capable of reading the Bible and understanding it objectively. They wrongly focus on the limitations of humanity and overemphasize them to the point of doubting that objective truth from the Bible could ever be definitively known. In their estimation man is so influenced by his mind's flawed starting point that he could never understand the Bible. His subjective knowledge, what his mind thinks is reality, is an insurmountable barrier to understanding God's objective truth.

But those skeptics are frankly unbiblical in their thinking. What we just learned about the Spirit's illuminating ministry is the answer to man's inadequate, fallen, biased, prejudiced mind. The Spirit is the solution to the troubling consequences of the Fall. We can know God's objective truth because the Spirit is in us telling us what it is. We are not chained to our fallen, darkened minds because the chains are broken; we are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We can discern things that are spiritual and be absolutely certain of God's truth in His Word (1 Cor. 2:13, 14).

B. Man believes history is irrefutable

Other skeptics believe history proves that it is impossible for people to know God's objective truth from Scripture. They point to variations in interpretations between theologians as their evidence. When two theologians claim to have the right interpretation even though their conclusions are contradictory, they conclude that



neither one could possibly know for sure if his interpretation was correct. They claim the interpretations are tainted by the theologians' limitations.

But an honest look at history reveals that those who adhere to the grammatical-historical principles for Bible interpretation almost always come to the same theological conclusions. The major doctrines in particular are well established historically. The historic establishment of doctrines is actually evidence that the Spirit's illuminating ministry overcomes the interpreter's human limitations.

We should never conclude that knowing God's Word is too hard or even impossible. God wants us to know Him through His Word so we might glorify His name. He gave us the Holy Spirit to make that possible. Let's let the Spirit work in us so we might know and live God's objective truth that we learn from God's Word.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Pray for Understanding

ASK: Why might believers ignore the illuminating ministry of the Spirit? (Q12) *They are unaware of it; they don't understand it; they aren't in God's Word enough for the Spirit to carry out His illuminating ministry.*

ASK: Have you ever prayed that God would allow you to understand His Word? Explain. (Q13)

ASK: How might such a practice change your reading and studying of the Bible? (Q14)

Challenge your learners to acknowledge the Spirit's illuminating ministry in their lives. Some of them may have never considered how important it is for understanding the Bible and for realizing true change in their lives.

Tap into the Potential

ASK: How does the illuminating ministry of the Spirit fit with our fast-paced world? (Q15) *It doesn't. The Spirit's illumination is coupled with time in God's Word.*

ASK: How effective will the Spirit's illuminating ministry be if we treat the Bible like a book of soundbites? (Q16) *The Spirit can work through His Word in a moment of time, but a deeper understanding of God's Word comes as we study entire passages rather than snippets here and there.*

As we have repeatedly mentioned in the course, there is no substitute for time in God's Word. There is no pill to take or magical shortcut. Even reading books by Christian authors is not a substitute for personal time in God's Word.

Remind your learners that if God wants us to spend time in His Word then He will provide the time to do it. If we think that we have no time for the Spirit to carry out His illumination ministry in our lives, then we are essentially saying that there is something wrong with God's ability to order our lives.