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## Do We Need the Spirit's Help to Understand?

by Bill Lockwood

Gordon Fee, a highly-respected commentator from the Assembly of God denomination, noted at 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul is talking about salvation through Jesus Christ “and God’s people ‘understand’ that precisely because they have received the Spirit” (*NICNT*, p. 113). Ironically, Fee loses his insightfulness here because of his Calvinistic predisposition. The text reads, “*But we received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God.*”

In this context the apostle is not discussing ‘understanding’ or ‘not understanding’ anything. Rather, it refers to the original revelation God gave to inspired men. The reception of the message of God (not ‘understanding’) was then delivered by verbal inspiration (v.13). The entire context is dealing with the SOURCE of the message of the cross. It did not originate with men (v.6-9). Instead, God ‘revealed’ these things by means of the Holy Spirit (v. 10). However, let us review, for clarity’s sake, what results if we take the position that only those who ‘have the Holy Spirit’ really understand God’s Word.

*First*, we all become infallible. This means that those whom God assists in understanding the text are incapable of error; incapable of making a mistake. The Roman Church asserts this regarding the pope. When he speaks *ex cathedra*—or “out of the chair” (meaning in an official capacity)—he is incapable of making a mistake!! The doctrine that we have the identical assistance in understanding the text makes little popes of all of us! Infallibility is the natural conclusion to this idea.

*Second*, why do not those who are so inspired ‘correct’ the textual problems of the New Testament Greek text. There are literally thousands of differences in various manuscripts—although not generally amounting to any doctrinal questions. If individuals are actually moved by the Holy Spirit to understand what the text actually means, why does not one of them stand up and tell us which variant reading is the correct one? Clearly, none do so because they have not that ability.

*Third*, if the Holy Spirit must assist one directly to understand the message, what about the non-Christian who is listening to the message of the cross? Must the Holy Spirit aid him in comprehending what is being said? If so, then why preach? Why not, as old-line Calvinistic churches still do, just wait for the Holy Spirit to come on a person before even preaching the gospel to him? It will do no good to preach if he has not the interpretive key—the Holy Spirit!!

*Fourth*, why would the apostles refer to God’s message delivered to them as a ‘revelation’ of His will, if indeed there is nothing revealed about it? Ephesians 3:3 says “*how that by revelation was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby if you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ.*” To “reveal” means to “make it known” to man! Why would the Bible be called a ‘revelation’ at all if it is in reality a ‘hidden book’ known only to those whom God has selected to inspire?

*Fifth*, this doctrine of ‘direct help to understand the text’ makes God a respecter of persons. God selects some to assist and some he does not. But, Acts 10:34 says God is NO respecter of persons.

*Sixth*, the direct assistance of the Holy Spirit idea makes the Bible superfluous; unnecessary. Why even have the text if God must come along and help us understand what he revealed?

*Seventh*, how would one know that he/she is actually receiving the assistance to understand properly from the Holy Spirit? God revealed it the first time, but we cannot understand it—so what confidence do we have that we can understand it correctly with this kind of help?

*Eighth*, why is it brethren, that ALL of those churches (including some of our own nowadays) who have this direct assistance of the Holy Spirit to understand the text ALL disagree as to what the text means? Why this disagreement if the same God is aiding all to see it? This consideration alone ought to cause fair-minded individuals to question the doctrine under review.

*Ninth*, have you ever noted that the language that is favored today to explain this theory—‘Holy Spirit moving among us, etc.’—is actually utilized in the Bible to discuss the role of *inspired prophets of God*? (See 2 Peter 1:21) Peter is discussing the origin of the Old Testament and says “*For no prophecy ever came by the will of man but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.*” Note that the huge mistake here made is that people today remove passages from their first-century miraculous context and wish to apply them to today in the same way. The same error is made at 1 Corinthians 2:12.