

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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How God Opens Hearts

If the Holy Spirit guides believers into understanding truth, then why are believers so hopelessly divided? We need to re-examine the underlying premise regarding how God opens hearts.

"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Lk. 24:27).

"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Lk. 24:32).

"And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (Lk. 24:45).



In Calvinist theology, the sinner is incapable of understanding, much less obeying, God's word. Only when God chooses to execute a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon his heart ("irresistible grace"—the "I" in Calvinism's TULIP), is the sinner's heart opened to understand and obey the Word.

Is this a scriptural concept? The third verse in our trio of opening texts seems to support the idea. The apostles could not comprehend what the Scriptures taught about Christ until their hearts were "opened" to receive it. Looks simple, huh?

But there are a number of problems with this view of the verse. First, these are not unregenerate sinners, but Jesus' own apostles, men who long ago had pledged their hearts and lives to Him, and had even performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. If they had already received the saving grace of the Spirit, then how do we explain their deficiency on this occasion?

If God was providing these men some kind of miraculous insight into truth (that was heretofore miraculously hidden from them), then upon what basis does God decide when, where, and who gets this divine gift? There are an awful lot of passages in God's word that I would dearly love to have this kind of assistance in understanding. If He does not provide it to everyone, is He not then a respecter of persons?

Finally, if God gives people special access to understanding truth, then why is Christianity still plagued with so many disagreements? And these divisions exist among people who all claim to have the Holy Spirit guiding their understanding of the Scriptures.

Clearly, God and the Holy Spirit are not responsible for the divisions among believers. Faulty interpretations among Bible students (and the divisions that follow) are the result of faulty knowledge and/or faulty attitudes in the readers, nothing more. Claiming special Holy Spirit guidance in our Bible study sets us up for self-reinforcing deception.

Look carefully at the earlier verses in this chapter describing the same phenomenon at work in the two travelers to Emmaus. They, too, claimed that Jesus "opened the Scriptures to us" (v. 32); but He did so by "expounding to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (v. 27). Get it? Their minds were opened to understanding the Scriptures *by those Scriptures being explained to them*. There was nothing miraculous here. Just old-fashioned study, discussion, and thinking among people who had a deep love for truth in their hearts.

That's how God opens our hearts today. The gospel—an intelligent message communicated in Scripture—is still God's power to save (Rom. 1:16).

— David King