

John Owen's View of Illumination: An Alternative to the Fuller-Erickson Dialogue

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In response to Daniel Fuller's view regarding illumination, Millard Erickson periodically challenges his position from exegetical, biblical, theological, and logical perspectives.¹ In turn, Fuller gives his own position on the doctrine of illumination. In part this article provides a summary of the significant issues raised by these two authors concerning the Holy Spirit's role in understanding the Scriptures.

The other portion of this study presents an alternative model for illumination, a view presented by John Owen, Puritan pastor and theologian of the seventeenth century. Owen's writings on illumination are chosen because of the high regard many scholars have for him.² According to Packer, Owen is "the greatest among Puritan theologians. For solidarity, profundity, massiveness, and majesty in exhibiting from Scripture God's ways with sinful mankind there is no one to touch him."³

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Issues Raised in the Fuller-Erickson Dialogue

Fuller's and Erickson's views on illumination exemplify some of the crucial differences on this doctrine. The following are some of the areas of central concern in understanding the Holy Spirit's illumining work.

Volitional or Notional?

Fuller believes that any individual (including the agnostic or atheist) with adequate exegetical skills can interpret the Scriptures accurately. Thus the Spirit's illumination is not needed to attain a cognitive understanding of the text.⁴

Rather than focusing on the noetic effects of sin, Fuller asserts that pride hinders the acceptance of truth; the desire to glorify self hinders a person from submitting to the truth of Scripture. This volitional aspect of sin can be subdued only by the Spirit, who leads one to embrace and welcome the truth of God's Word. Thus illumination is related to the

1. Daniel P. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 255–56; and idem, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 33–54. Chapter 2 of the third book particularly contrasts the views held by these two men.

2. For a few examples see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947), 7; Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 17; and Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971), 166–67.

3. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 81.

4. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," 192.

reception of the truth. The Spirit endows a person with love for God's Word so that it will be applied to his or her life.⁵

Erickson, on the other hand, regards illumination as a matter of *perception*. He says the Holy Spirit assists in grasping the meaning. Insufficient understanding of God's truth stems from the notional dimension of sin. As a result, the minds of the unregenerate and the believer have certain presuppositions that bias their understanding of Scripture. Only the Spirit can overcome these noetic effects of sin.⁶

Exegesis or the Spirit?

Some writers suggest that understanding the Scriptures comes from relying solely on the Spirit in prayer. "Pray for illumination from the Holy Spirit to see more of what already has been

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written... The more you pray...the more insight the Lord will grant to you."⁷ However, this position, by advocating listening to God's voice may unwittingly give the false impression that the grammatical-historical-cultural aspects of hermeneutics need not be considered. Berkouwer attributes the term "pneumatic" or spiritual exegesis to this position.⁸ This "intuitive" model focuses on the application of the biblical text to one's life.⁹

Fuller discusses examples from church history of this "spiritual" approach to biblical interpretation. He states that by attributing interpretation solely to the work of the Holy Spirit, allegorical and typological interpretations can result. Fuller then argues that rather than depending on the Spirit for illumination, one must depend on exegetical skills.¹⁰ Scripture can be understood by exercising reliable hermeneutical principles apart from the Spirit (which Erickson describes as a "disjunctive relationship").¹¹ Fuller grants that the Spirit's role is to change the attitude of the exegete to avoid skewing the meaning of Scripture. In response, Erickson believes Fuller has "overreacted" and has virtually eliminated the Spirit's role in hermeneutics. As an alternative Erickson affirms a

5. Fuller is not alone in this position. Others who hold this view include William Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 289; and Roy B. Zuck, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (April-June 1984), 123-24. Zuck writes that spiritual enlightenment "helps believers understand the implications and values of God's truth and welcome it with a view to personal appropriation" (Roy B. Zuck, *Teaching with Spiritual Power* [1963; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993]).

6. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 44-45. Others who hold this view include Robert L. Saucy, *The Bible: Breathed from God* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1978), 105; Fred Klooster, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 460-61; Donald Bloesch, *Christian Foundations*, vol. 2: *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 200; and Erik C. Fudge, "Language, Revelation and Illumination," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (October 1973): 12.

7. Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 143.

8. G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 111.

9. René Padilla, "The Interpreted Word: Reflections on Contextual Hermeneutics," in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 297-98.

10. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," 189-90, 192.

11. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 38.

conjunctive relationship between the Spirit and exegesis. In other words one must rely on both these elements to arrive at a proper understanding of the biblical text.¹²

Cognitive or Spiritual Understanding?

If enlightenment from the Holy Spirit and the use of hermeneutical guidelines are both necessary for discerning the meaning of Scripture, the nature of “understanding” must be considered.

Fuller has a one-level view of “understanding,” which pertains to the grammatical-exegetical interpretation of the text. He focuses on the cognitive dimension of interpretation because of his skepticism about extreme “spiritual” interpretations.¹³

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On the other hand Erickson supports a two-level view of understanding, which stresses both the cognitive and experiential dimensions of truth. These dimensions are complementary, not antithetical. The “deeper level of perception” is available to those whose hearts are spiritually sensitive to the mind of God.¹⁴

Summary of the Dialogue

Erickson provides a fairly accurate analysis of Fuller’s position on illumination with perhaps one exception. He creates the impression that Fuller equates □□□□□□□□ with the “cognitive knowledge of things, facts, or persons. It lacks something of the personal dimension of oida.”¹⁵ However, Fuller avoids this distinction by interpreting □□□□□□□□ (in 1 Cor 2:14) to mean “an experiential knowledge and appreciation” of biblical truth.¹⁶ From Erickson’s analysis of Fuller’s position on illumination, one is left with the impression that Bible interpreters must choose from various options. That is, in three areas mentioned in the discussion—volitional versus cognitive, exegesis versus Spirit, cognitive versus spiritual understanding—opposing views on illumination have been created. Is such a dialectical tension necessary for the doctrine of illumination? Is a synthesis of these views a viable option?

12. *Ibid.*, 54.

13. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” 191; cf. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 39. In support of Fuller’s position, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Evangelical Hermeneutics: Restatement, Advance or Retreat from the Reformation?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (April-July 1982): 168.

14. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 47, 54. Others who agree with Erickson’s position include Donald Bloesch, *Christian Foundations*, vol. 1: *A Theology of Word and Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 59; Arthur Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 63; and Clark Pinnock, “The Role of the Spirit in Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (December 1993): 491-497; and Zuck, *Teaching with Spiritual Power*, 60.

15. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 40.

16. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” 192.

Owen's Teaching on Illumination ¹⁷

John Owen's thinking on spiritual enlightenment is best understood within the context of his day. On the one hand Quakers believed it was possible to discern the truth of God by the Spirit alone.¹⁸ On the other hand rationalists (such as the Cambridge

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Platonists and the Socinians) believed reason was sufficient for understanding the Bible.¹⁹ Owen's thinking represented that of many of the Puritans of his day.

The three issues highlighted by the Fuller-Erickson discussion on the topic of illumination are examined on the following pages from the perspective of John Owen.

Volitional and Notional

Rather than saying illumination involves either a volitional aspect or a notional aspect, Owen argued that both are involved. To do this, he extends the definition of spiritual illumination beyond interpretation of the biblical text.

The volitional aspect of illumination is involved in what may be called "salvific illumination." This expression refers to the Spirit's work in regeneration and the ensuing acceptance and conviction of the fact that Scripture is God's authoritative, written Word.

²⁰ These areas are interrelated: regeneration by the Spirit has a profound effect on the mind, which enables one to accept the authority of Scripture. In demonstrating the absolute necessity of salvific illumination on the mind, Owen discussed two obstacles to a saving knowledge of God: the sinful human nature and the character of Scripture.²¹

Sin has a profound, negative influence on the human mind, the will, and the desires. Because of sin's sway in these areas, individuals are held in ignorance concerning spiritual truth.²² Spiritual darkness hinders the mind from believing the Scriptures with a genuine faith.²³ Spiritual blindness is a dynamic, active, evil force within the human mind, which is hostile toward God and His truth and which causes the individual to reject the Scriptures.²⁴ The mind is strongly influenced by one's evil will and by the sinful desires of the human heart. Desires such as pride, the love of praise, and a love for sin cause a person not only to misunderstand the Scriptures but also to hate and to deny

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17 17. John Owen's teaching on illumination is primarily found in his three treatises entitled *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*; *The Reason of Faith*; and *Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God*. These treatises are included in William Goold, ed., *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols., (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965–68), vols. 3 and 4.

18. Rufus Matthew Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 348; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Puritan Spirit* (London: Epworth, 1967), 175; and Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950), 2.

19. For a representative sampling of these rationalists see Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), x; H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700–1960* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1979), 38; and John R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 3d ed. (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1973), 254.

20. See Goold, *The Works of John Owen*, vols. 3 and 4.

21. *Ibid.*, 4:174–84, 194–99.

22. *Ibid.*, 3:242–82; 4:174–84.

23. *Ibid.*, 4:58.

24. *Ibid.*, 3:269; 4:184. This spiritual darkness affects the reasoning ability with regard to spiritual and nonspiritual matters.

them.²⁵ Ignorance and errors regarding spiritual truth are attributed to a person's sinful mind and desires.²⁶

Owen's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2:14 demonstrates the dreadful plight of humankind.²⁷ He explained that the verb $\alpha\gamma\alpha\gamma\alpha\gamma\alpha\gamma$ means to receive or accept something by choice. God's truth is foolishness to those who do not have the Spirit, for they have neither the will nor the supernatural power to accept divine truth. Thus there is animosity toward spiritual matters.

The second obstacle to understanding God's Word has to do with the character of Scripture. Owen believed that the depth of Scripture's truths hinders one from properly understanding it. Doctrines such as the Trinity and the Incarnation make it difficult for depraved human reason to comprehend spiritual truth.²⁸

In summary, biblical truth is not accepted because of both the volitional and notional aspects of human nature, and because of the character of Scripture. However, two means are available by which to overcome the volitional and notional barriers, thus enabling one to accept the truth of God's Word. These means are Scripture itself and the Holy Spirit. To avoid the extremes of his day—subjectivism and rationalism—Owen maintained that these components must be held in tandem.

Scripture possesses a "sacred light" that is related to its perspicuity.²⁹ The "clearness" or "plainness" of Scripture means that there is no inherent weakness or flaw within it that would obstruct one's understanding of biblical truth.³⁰ In view of the clarity of the Scriptures, it seems that to Owen the notional barrier is not an issue. However, he believed that while the truth is plain or clear, this clearness of Scripture alone does not remove spiritual blindness.³¹ Because of the sinful human condition, Scripture can be understood intelligently only if a person depends on the Spirit.³² The Holy Spirit exposes and removes personal prejudices that obstruct the understanding of the Bible.³³ The Spirit

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accomplishes this goal by implanting new spiritual life within an individual. Once regeneration occurs, the Spirit enables a person to accept the truth of God's Word and then to understand Scripture genuinely and experientially.³⁴

The Roles of the Spirit and Exegesis

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to exegesis may be called "interpretive illumination," in contrast to "salvific illumination." According to Owen, the Spirit's illumination is necessary for various reasons if God's Word is to be properly understood.

25. *Ibid.*, 4:179–83.

26. *Ibid.*, 4:175.

27. *Ibid.*, 3:257–69.

28. *Ibid.*, 14:276; 4:131, 194, 196.

29. *Ibid.*, 4:130.

30. *Ibid.*, 4:193; 14:277.

31. *Ibid.*, 16:321.

32. *Ibid.*, 14:276.

33. *Ibid.*, 4:193.

34. *Ibid.*, 4:4, 14–15.

³⁵ The depravity of human nature and the character of Scripture make it impossible to accept the truth; they also hinder one from understanding the truth.

While human reason has been impaired by sin, the human mind can still reason, which makes the use of exegetical skills possible and necessary in the hermeneutical process. These skills help give a basic knowledge of the meaning of words just as other great literature may be understood by similar linguistic principles. However, the academic disciplines are subservient to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit because of the unique, supernatural nature of Scripture. ³⁶ Thus the Spirit and exegesis are both necessary.

The Spirit is the main means by which a believer is helped in understanding biblical truth. ³⁷ The Spirit accomplishes this task by working in the mind of the believer and by using the Scriptures. The Spirit works directly on the mind of a believer to enable him to grasp the truth of Scripture. ³⁸ This means that attitudes such as laziness, pride, and negative biases should be removed to prepare the mind for illumination. The Spirit can then implant the mind with attitudes such as humility, meekness, and teachability. These attitudes are graciously given by God so that one is able to understand biblical truth. ³⁹ Without these one will not gain the kind of understanding God desires to give (Matt 18:3). But with the Spirit's enablement, a person may attain a correct understanding of Scripture. ⁴⁰

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The Spirit also illumines by shedding light on the Scriptures. Owen believed that God's Word is the "most sufficient and absolutely perfect way and means" to lead a person to a proper understanding of biblical truths. ⁴¹ However, Scripture may seem to be less than "perfect" in subject matter (difficult doctrines) and in the arrangement of biblical truth (not in a systematic fashion). ⁴² Owen, however, argued these features do not detract from the Spirit's work of illumination. ⁴³ Thus while the sinful mind is drawn to evil, the Spirit draws the mind to the beauty and the "wonderful things" found in Scripture. ⁴⁴

Owen believed that Jesus' words about the Spirit guiding His disciples into all truth (John 16:13) are applicable for today's followers of Jesus. ⁴⁵ "All truth" pertains to spiritual (not scientific) knowledge. Also the Spirit reveals truth according to a believer's personal and ministry needs. No believer will lack what is needed for growth in sanctification and service to others. Owen does not rule out the possibility that a believer may have a faulty interpretation of truths not essential for the Christian life.

35. *Ibid.*, 4:161.

36. *Ibid.*, 4:155–58.

37. *Ibid.*, 4:124, 133.

38. *Ibid.*, 4:124–25, 163.

39. *Ibid.*, 4:186–87.

40. *Ibid.*, 4:122.

41. *Ibid.*, 4:187.

42. *Ibid.*, 4:187–99.

43. *Ibid.*, 4:188–94.

44 44. *Ibid.*, 4:135.

45 45. *Ibid.*, 4:142–43, 146–47.

Owen pointed out that the Holy Spirit teaches the truth to a believer through His “anointing” (1 John 2:20 , 27),⁴⁶ that is, through the Holy Spirit Himself who makes truth known to an individual.⁴⁷ The Spirit gives a believer assurance of the truthfulness of God’s Word by experiencing its power, and by having a joy and love for the truth.⁴⁸ This encounter with the truth assures a person that he has a right understanding of Scripture which enables him to stand firm against false teachings.⁴⁹ Thus the Spirit’s anointing means that He illumines a believer’s mind, granting understanding and personal experience of God’s Word so that he commits himself wholeheartedly to the truth.

While Owen strongly endorsed the Spirit’s role in

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illumination, he also believed that readers must utilize hermeneutical skills in studying the Bible.⁵⁰ They must be concerned about the historical context and the literary structure of the passage being studied.⁵¹ In addition Bible students gain a definite advantage by using the original languages.

Owen wrote about other means that aid believers in interpreting the Bible.⁵² They must ask God in prayer to understand and to experience His Word.⁵³ In prayer, negative attitudes toward Scripture are exposed and removed when attitudes such as humility and meekness are formed, and in prayer the reader becomes more teachable concerning God’s truths.⁵⁴ Thus prayer plays a vital role in illumining the mind regarding biblical truth. One may gain a notional understanding of Scripture, but prayer provides power for these truths to transform a believer’s life. Besides personal prayer, each must submit his understanding of biblical teachings to other believers. This can be achieved through mutual instruction in Bible studies and preaching.⁵⁵ While believers have a basic knowledge of the truth, they all have the continued need to learn from others. Individuals should not assume that interpretations are correct without formal instruction from the church’s authorities.⁵⁶ Thus Owen struck a balance between personal and corporate interpretation.

46 46. *Ibid.*, 4:148, 168, 303, 389–99.

47. Dunn supports Owen’s view: “It is probably a mistake to distinguish sharply between the two.... All Christians have knowledge, because all have been anointed with the Holy Spirit” (James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* [London: SCM, 1970], 197, 199).

48. Goold, *The Works of John Owen* , 4:397; 12:52.

49. *Ibid.*, 4:145–54, 167–68.

50. *Ibid.*, 4:201, 209–19. Cf. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* , 97-105. Packer discusses some basic hermeneutical principles that shaped the Puritans’ understanding of Scripture.

51. Goold, *The Works of John Owen* , 4:223.

52. These additional means are covered in *ibid.*, 4:199–229.

53. Owen also talked about how illumination by the Spirit strengthens one’s prayer life (*ibid.*, 4:310). Obviously Owen was not talking about a quick prayer in which God illumines the mind of the believer. Instead, the person must practice “continued prayer” and “frequent and fervent prayers,” and must “abide in prayer and abound in prayer” (*ibid.*, 4:154, 160, 170).

54. Owen’s writings give the impression that negative influences can be totally removed from a person’s thinking; he stated that prayer can “exterminate” the “old leaven” (*ibid.*, 4:202). Besides meekness and humility, other qualities that promote understanding of God’s Word are godly fear, reverence, and submission (*ibid.*, 4:154, 160, 179, 183, 185, 186).

55. *Ibid.*, 3:304–07; 4:12–13, 147, 190–91, 226–29. Cf. Gerald Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 201–4. He speaks about the Puritans’ view of preaching as a means of spiritual enlightenment.

56. Goold, *The Works of John Owen* , 4:486–98; 16:74–77.

Cognitive and Experiential Understanding

The nature of biblical knowledge makes illumination imperative. It can be argued that illumination by the Spirit is

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unnecessary if one believes that Scripture can be plainly understood. If this is the case, can the unregenerate person understand Scripture by means of his own rational abilities? Owen raised the question because this thinking was prevalent among the rationalists of his day.⁵⁷ With this emphasis on human reason, the concept of understanding the Bible is reduced to the cognitive level.

At this point it is important to consider Owen's distinction between intellectual or "notional" knowledge ($\square\square\square\square\square\square\square$) and true experiential knowledge ($\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square$).⁵⁸ The first is informational in nature, while the latter is transformational.⁵⁹ The former does not lead to a personal relationship with Christ, whereas the latter does. This experiential knowledge is made possible only by illumination.

While illumination leads to experiencing the truth, so does obedience. When truth is obeyed, a person experiences the reality of truth in life. One cannot understand truth if it is divorced from practical holiness. Truth is meant to be obeyed and experienced.

Conclusion

Having examined Owen's teaching on illumination in the three areas mentioned at the outset of this article, a critique of the positions held by Fuller and Erickson is now offered.

Volitional or Notional?

Owen would agree with both Fuller and Erickson regarding the obstacles to illumination. He would affirm Fuller's argument that a person's will hinders him from embracing or welcoming the gospel as the truth.⁶⁰ At the same time, he would acknowledge Erickson's insistence that the noetic effects of sin prevent one from accepting the truth of the gospel.⁶¹

However, Owen would probably qualify Fuller's statement concerning those who consider the Bible as "foolishness" but can still accurately exegete Scripture.⁶² He would argue that while

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57. H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 11–12.

58. Goold, *The Works of John Owen*, 4:155–58.

59. Owen described $\square\square\square\square\square\square\square$ as a "notional speculative apprehension" attainable by any person (ibid., 14:276–77). This type of knowledge "affects only the speculative part of the mind" (ibid., 4:155–56). In contrast, true knowledge "gives the mind an experience of the power and efficacy of the truth known or discovered, so as to transform the soul and all its affections into it" (ibid., 156).

60. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," 191.

61. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 43–45.

62. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," 192.

this may be possible to some extent, one cannot be fully objective because of the evil biases within the heart of the unregenerate exegete.⁶³ Thus it may be practically impossible for a person to possess solely an unbiased “academic” concern.⁶⁴

Owen would also modify Erickson’s claim that Fuller is rationalistic by suggesting that Erickson is as much a rationalist as Fuller. That is, Erickson implies that the power of the mind is greater than the power of the will. Owen would support Fuller’s position that the “corruption of the will causes it to distort the intellect’s appreciation of the truth.”⁶⁵ This is based on his understanding of the human heart, which includes desires and will. Since the human will and desires have been affected by sin, the mind rejects spiritual truth. Therefore the heart is viewed as more corrupt than the mind.⁶⁶ In contrast, Erickson places greater emphasis on the effect of the mind on the will and in this sense he is more of a rationalist than Fuller. Owen and Fuller are not minimizing the effect that original sin has on the mind but are only discussing the interaction between the mind and the heart.

The Spirit or Exegesis?

Owen would agree with Erickson’s emphasis on the need to keep the roles of exegesis and the Spirit in a healthy tension. And Owen would agree with Fuller that the understanding of biblical truth cannot occur solely by the “direct illumination of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷

Owen affirmed, as does Fuller, the tendency for the regenerate person to distort the truth of the gospel because of selfish motives and desires. The believer’s indwelling by the Spirit is no guarantee that the truth will not be “modified.”⁶⁸ Owen’s discussion on the spiritual means of illumination (such as prayer, receptivity of and obedience to the truth) reminds one that spirituality must be closely related to the interpretation of Scripture. For this reason, Erickson stands corrected when he states, “It seems difficult for Fuller to integrate into his method of exegesis any positive role of the Holy Spirit in giving understanding of the

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passage.”⁶⁹ It seems that Fuller acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in exegesis by recognizing that He must remove one’s “ego-fulfillment” desires.⁷⁰

Cognitive or Experiential Knowledge?

Apart from the earlier qualification of Erickson’s assessment of Fuller’s view of cognitive knowledge, a few other comments may now be stated.

Erickson speaks of “heart knowledge” as a “deeper insight into the text” or as a “flash of understanding.”⁷¹ Such a definition only suggests further cognitive insight into God’s

63. Goold, *The Works of John Owen*, 3:271, 274–75; 4:58.

64. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” 192.

65. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 39; cf. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” 192.

66. Goold, *The Works of John Owen*, 3:252, 267–68.

67. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” 189.

68. *Ibid.*, 197.

69. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 49.

70. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” 197.

Word. However, Owen described “heart knowledge” as the truth one experiences in his or her own life. This view of knowledge is related to Owen’s understanding of the anointing of the truth by which the Spirit enables a person to experience the truth.⁷²

Owen would agree with Erickson in limiting the definition of illumination to the truths that are “essential to salvation or to Christian fellowship.” As a result, Christians differ in their opinions on Bible passages that are not essential to these two areas.⁷³

It seems preferable to hold that the doctrine of illumination does not reflect an either/or scenario as stated by Erickson. Rather, a theological understanding of spiritual enlightenment embraces more of a both/and situation. In other words while Erickson expresses some valid concerns, Fuller’s view of this doctrine has a number of commendable features.

71. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* , 39, 54. Commenting on Jesus’ words regarding the truth in John 14–16 , Erickson mentions that the truth refers to the cognitive dimension (ibid., 41). Again, Owen would suggest that the Spirit’s leading involves both the cognitive and experiential dimensions.

72. In Owen’s words this anointing causes one not only to know the truth but moves one to “cleave” to it with “joy and delight,” causing one to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Goold, *The Works of John Owen* , 4:394).

73. Ibid., 4:229–30; cf. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* , 54.