

HOW DOES GOD OPEN HEARTS

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In response to a recent article on whether or not “the Holy Spirit helps Christians to understand the scripture”, we have received request to explain certain passages that may seem to contradict what the conclusion drawn in that article, or at least deserve some explanation. We are happy to do so at this time. The first article was entitled, “DOES THE ‘INDWELLING SPIRIT’ HELP US UNDERSTAND?”. If you have not read the article, it is available upon request by contacting us at our e-mail address shown at the conclusion of the article now being written. Our clear conviction is that the Holy Spirit absolute does **not** directly help anyone to understand scripture, other than what He has already done, giving us plain and understandable truth. Yet, to some there are concerns about certain passages in the New Testament that allude to something **God** does that are related to our understanding of scripture. These passages were not written directly in connection with the Holy Spirit assisting us, but related to God “giving” or “granting” certain conditions whereby one may receive the truth or understand and obey it. Let’s examine them in their context, and see how they do or do not relate to the matter of the Spirit’s assistance.

Luke 24:45 is the first scripture given. The KJV reads, *“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”* Other references in this chapter relate to the eyes and hearts being either closed or open to certain truths. In verse 15, some “reasoned” together, but their eyes were “holden” (v. 16) “that they should not know him.’ We are not told if there were tears in their eyes, or if there was a special divine action that caused them “not” to recognize Jesus so as to allow Him to further teach them and reveal Himself to them. Then, in verse 25, Jesus stated that they were foolish in not believing “all” that the prophets have spoken. Now, their “eyes” and “hearts” were **not** fully open to the truth. Then, He expounded on the “scriptures” what the prophets wrote, and **then** their eyes were “opened” (v. 31) and they concluded that His presentation of the scripture had begun their enlightenment (v. 32). Then, with the eleven gathered together, Jesus rebuked them for their “unbelief” (Mark 16:14) as they had not fully concluded that He had been raised from the dead. He then referred to the **scriptures** (v. 44). Now, it is said that He “opened their understanding”, that they might fully understanding regarding His resurrection, as He reminded them of what the “scriptures” said regarding this matter. What Jesus **said** caused them to understand what the scriptures really meant. We see nothing “miraculous” in opening their hearts, but rather the power of what was said.

Acts 16:14 is the second scripture given. The KJV reads, *“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”* The “open” heart refers to either the condition of her heart before the things she heard from Paul, or to something manifested in her obedience after she heard. We do know that the Bereans of Acts 17:11 had open hearts (“readiness of mind”) before their faith was developed, which could be the case of Lydia. Or, it could be that God is simply given credit for this woman **having** an open heart, which allowed her receive the word with all readiness of mind, and then attend to the things spoken by Paul. Either way, she had an open heart, and it is said that she “heard” before it is said “whose heart the Lord opened” (v. 14). In either case, there appears to be no “special” working of God to open her heart. We might

note that reference is made to her having an open heart **before** she attended to the things Paul spoke, and there would be absolutely **no** kind of an “indwelling Holy Spirit” within her, for she had not obeyed the gospel. She either had an open heart before she heard, or it was manifested **in** her obedience, but there would have been no involvement with the Holy Spirit in “helping her to understand” the scripture.

We need to remember that **the circumstance and environment always determine the reception of the word of God. God, in His wisdom and providence, brought a favorable environment to Lydia, so her heart was open to truth, as one who was already desirous of worshiping God.** So, it could be said that God opened her heart, just as God closes the hearts of those who are unfavorable to His word, as was the case of Pharaoh in Moses’ time.

John 6:65 is the third scripture given. The KJV reads, *“And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father.”* What He had “said” unto them regarding this, is found in verses 44 and 45 of the same chapter. There He stated the Father would “draw” a man to Christ (v. 44). Then, he used “scripture” to explain what He meant, and stated, *“Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”* So, those “given of the Father” are those who come to Christ, and they are the ones who are drawn to Christ **by** having heard, and learning of the Father. Again, the power is in the “scripture” as used by Christ. God **grants** those who “hear” and “learn” to go to Christ.

John 12:39-40 is the fourth scripture given. The KJV reads, *“Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”* The “they” of this passage refers to those who had already **heard** Jesus speak, and had **seen** His miracles, and yet could not believe, because of their hardened hearts. Did the Lord not allow them to believe and be converted, or does this description describe some who had hardened their own hearts and refused to believe? One can put a ball of **wax** and a ball of **clay** (both the same size) out into the sunshine, and one will melt and the other will harden—neither because OF the sun, but because of what they are. In Exodus 7:14, God told Moses, *“Pharaoh’s heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go.”* God sent word to Pharaoh to let the people go, but he refused (Exo. 9:13-14). Because his heart was hard, he refused to let the people go (Exo. 10:1). Because of the plagues that came upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, it could be said that “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Exo. 10:20). God hardened his heart because of His word, but Pharaoh’s own heart was stubborn and hard. God hardened the hearts of the unbelieving Jews of John 12, because they rejected Jesus. It was because of their hard hearts that they were not able to believe, and **this action** is simply confirmed by what Isaiah wrote. “The words refer to those which have gone before, not to those which follow, and then by an addition gives the reason more fully.” (Elicott’s Commentary) In summation, the Jews were blinded and hardened in heart already, **that** they could not see and understand, and this was simply confirmed prophetically by Isaiah in the Old Testament. It was not a case of God **or** the Holy Spirit directly causing their lack of understanding, and neither directly causing anything. In Matt. 13:15, it is clearly stated **why** some are not open to the truth, for their eyes “they have closed”, just as Satan hardened his own heart and thus rejected God’s plea.

2 Tim. 2:7, 25 is the fifth reference given. In the KJV, they read, *“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things....In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.”* These verses refer to something God “gives” or “grants”, as

various translations read. Acts 11:18 answers all this. God had the word **preached** to the Gentiles to give them the opportunity to understand and to repent. God thus extended “repentance unto life” to the Gentiles. Again, nothing said about a direct influence of an indwelling of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this. God wants all to understand, and sends instructions to give them opportunity to repent. God desires that none be lost, and His disciples are to teach the lost to give those with receptive hearts to obey His will.

2 Thess. 2:10-11 is the sixth and final reference given. In the KJV, it reads, *“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”* Verse 12 goes on to say that “had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Just as God sent the plagues to the Egyptians, so He allows strong delusions to come to those choose to “believe a lie.” Nothing direct or indirect on the part of God or the indwelling Spirit to cause an acceptance or rejection of the truth. My own understanding of these matters does not come from either, but from a study of the divine word itself.

In summation, we need to understand that **the circumstances and environment always determine the reception of God’s word.** God, in His wisdom and providence, brings a favorable environment to those anxious to learn the truth.

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