

People of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

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I am thankful that Pastor Chris was able to teach last week on a very important section of Scripture regarding the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13. My experience tells me that many Christians have a decent doctrinal understanding of Jesus. He's the second person of the Trinity. Fully God and fully man. Born of a virgin. Lived a perfect life. Died as a substitute on the cross. Resurrected on the third day. Savior to sinners and Lord of all. Now at the right hand of God. Will come again. Most Christians could articulate that.

Most also have a working understanding of God the Father. His name is helpful. God *the Father*. We understand a father in terms of authority, leadership, and love. God the Father is all those. We see Him as leader of the Godhead and our heavenly Father as well. Most Christians get that.

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, though, not only is there a lack of understanding, there is often an unease and perplexity about who He is and what He is doing in the Church. Part of this might be His name. For those of you who grew up with the King James Bible, like I did, the Holy Spirit was not called the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was called the Holy Ghost. I remember as a child thinking about the Holy Ghost and not liking the word Ghost. I was afraid enough of the dark. To suggest that the Holy Ghost was with me all the time was enough to send a little boy to his mommy. Further, when you talk about the Holy Spirit, somebody always knows somebody who got really "into the Holy Spirit" and strange things happened.

All of this is very unfortunate because Jesus told His disciples that it was better for us if He left the world so that the Holy Spirit could come (John 16:7). Think of that. If you could pick having Jesus here or the Holy Spirit, who would you choose? Apparently, the Holy Spirit is "better" for us now than even the bodily presence of Jesus. He is called our *Helper*. How many of us need help today? He is called our *Comforter*. How many of us need comfort today?

God's Word brings us to another wonderful activity the Spirit is powerfully accomplishing in this world – teaching. He is called our *Teacher*. How many of us need wisdom today? How many of us long to know God better? How many of us need truth to live in this crazy world? The Holy Spirit is given to us as our Teacher, to teach us what is true and redemptive and to help us apply it to our lives.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

Last week's passage focused on the Spirit as the revealer of God's wisdom. Let's ask the question, *How has His wisdom been revealed?* Chapter 1 said the cross is the wisdom of God. So the cross, the gospel, is God's wisdom. Where are the words of the gospel found? In words inspired by the Holy Spirit and written for us in the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God and the wisdom of God and was shaped and inspired by the Spirit of God. So

the Spirit is active in the whole process. The Spirit reveals it, writes it, teaches it, and allows us to understand it.

Our passage today is going to contrast two kinds of people. The natural person and the spiritual person. See if you can hear how they are different.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

There is some really important truth here that will explain much of why people view Christians and Christianity the way they do.

Who is the "Natural Person?"

It would be helpful here to think about one way we use the word "natural." Do you ever say on a Saturday morning, *Are we going to the store "au naturel"?* What do we mean by that? Are we going "as we are," in sweat pants and a hat. Natural foods are foods that are as close as they can be to the way they are off the tree or out of the ground. They don't get additives; they don't get altered. We call them "organic." So who is the "organic"/natural person? In context, the natural person is a spiritually descriptive term for our spiritual status prior to saving faith, without the Spirit; the man *au naturel* without the benefits of the Spirit as revealer of truth. We are born as sinners. Naturally, we are without spiritual understanding as a result of sin. So this is the unbeliever as he comes spiritually into the world. Why did parents have to dedicate themselves to the task of passing the faith on to their children this morning? Because those cute little darlings are sinners and the task of guiding them toward saving faith and a life fully committed to Christ doesn't come naturally.

He does not welcome or treasure spiritual truth

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God... (1 Corinthians 2:14)

The Greek word for "accept" is the usual word for "welcoming a guest." What do you do when you welcome a guest at the door of your home? You open the door, engage in a little banter, welcome them in, take their coat, offer them something to drink, usher them to a comfortable seat, and begin to talk with them. That's welcoming.

The imagery here is of God's wisdom at the door of the natural man's heart and mind. The natural man is not interested in welcoming that truth. He'll shout through the door, "Go away!" There is no interest. No welcome. No warmth or welcoming of "the things of the Spirit of God."

If I might push this a little farther, do you see the tragedy here? On the doorstep of their understanding is something that would be an immense and eternal blessing to them. If they understood, they would realize the truth at the door is what their deepest longings cry for. The Spirit is there with good news about Jesus Christ and forgiveness of sins and eternal life. For this analogy to be appropriate, imagine the house as a house of horrors filled with disease and death. A house filled with strife and depression and hopelessness. A house with no light and nothing beautiful inside. Onto the doorstep comes the Holy Spirit with a cure for all the disease, hope for all the depression, and a light that would fill every part of the

house with beauty and glory. Yet, they will **not** welcome Him in; they *will not accept* what He has to say. Why?

God's truth and wisdom sounds foolish

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him... (1 Corinthians 2:14)

The gospel sounds like folly. This is because we have a fundamental flaw that is built into the DNA of our sin nature. We view the world with the presupposition that man is naturally good, all that is real and true, can be seen, touched, or scientifically examined. We come into the world wired to think about things from a man-centered perspective.

Then somewhere along the way our flawed worldview is confronted by the biblical worldview. Christianity says nearly the opposite of everything we heretofore assumed to be true. It says man is morally corrupt, spiritually dead, and broken in all key relationships. The evils of the world come from sinful men acting sinfully. There is a moral code. Man is accountable for his actions to his Creator. There is existence after death in heaven or hell. In other words, the Christian worldview runs against the grain of the natural man's philosophy and worldview (even if he can't articulate it). To the natural man, you might as well suggest that $2+2=7$. *What? This doesn't sound right to me. What you are suggesting sounds foolish.*

Here's just one example from this week. A young woman was influenced toward the gospel through a family in our church. She was going to be baptized and wanted her parents to come to the service. Her parents refused to come and told her it was "stupid and weird." That story is repeated over and over again in different ways and on many levels. God's truth sounds to the natural man like Charlie Brown's teacher, "Wa-wa wa-wawawa."

There is a reason it sounds like nonsense....

The natural person is unable to understand

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

These are important words. What is true of the natural person? He is NOT ABLE to understand spiritual truth. Not able? You can argue. You can shout. You can give him the top five Christian books on the subject. It doesn't matter. They cannot on their own spiritually discern the truth or appropriate it into their understanding as saving faith.

It's much like an experience I had on a trip. I have talked often of my time in Italy. I came back with a year of sermon illustrations. Sorry, here's another. I stayed in Rome in a little 10 room or so hotel. My room was just barely larger than the bed in the room. That's fine because the breakfast bar made up for it. Each morning I went there to get my pastry and European cappuccino. Yummy. There was a short, older Italian woman who worked breakfast each morning. For some reason, she took a liking to me and she would come and sit at my table and talk to me. I knew about two words in Italian. She didn't know one English word. This didn't stop her. I think she just wanted someone to listen. So I listened as she went on and on in Italian about what? I have no idea. We tried to communicate, but I just couldn't get it. I couldn't discern what she was saying. It didn't make sense to me.

This is how the gospel sounds to the people without the Spirit. They hear our words but they don't discern the meaning.

What did I need in that little breakfast room? I needed a translator. I needed someone to interpret what she was saying. I needed a helper. This is the glorious role of the Holy Spirit.

...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit...Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Corinthians 2:10, 12-13)

This is commonly called *Illumination*. Here's what happens. The Holy Spirit translates the gospel to the natural man's understanding. A dead man can't hear anything. He needs to be made alive. The Spirit does this by creating spiritual life in us through regeneration. He makes us alive spiritually (born again) and then translates the gospel to our understanding. We not only understand, we "welcome" the truth and rejoice in it. This leads us to embrace it by faith and commit ourselves to following Jesus with our lives. This is the miracle of salvation and the Holy Spirit is the one appropriating the gospel to us personally. We go from being "the natural person" (verse 14), to being the spiritual person (verse 15). All this is by the Spirit. This is God's grace, once again ensuring that man gets the good and God gets the glory. Salvation is all of God.

Quickly, let's finish the chapter.

The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:15-16)

The result of the Spirit's work is that we are able to judge or appraise all things in light of God's truth. The unbeliever has no point of reference. His approach to life and meaning doesn't have a firm starting point. The Christian, with the help of the Spirit, interprets life and everything else from the starting point of the cross. Now we have a core, a center, a truth to build our lives upon.

I am reading a book written by a man in our church about the development of African American spirituality (*Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, Dr. Robert W. Kelleman & Karole A. Edwards). There is an account in the story of how slaves who ran away from slavery found their way to freedom. They didn't have maps. They didn't have GPS. What they had was the North Star. It was a fixed position and as long as they journeyed toward it, they would eventually find freedom.

In Colorado Springs, if you're lost, you just need to find Pike's Peak to know where you are. We could use one of those around here. Actually, we do have a North Star; a point of reference – the cross and the gospel are the wisdom of God. We ought to be full of thanksgiving that we can see it and know what it means because the Spirit has revealed it to us. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)* Isn't it great to have direction in life; truth to live by?

But is himself to be judged by no one. (1 Corinthians 2:15) The second phrase there could sound like a Christian is above accountability. That is not what it means. He is simply saying that an unbeliever cannot judge God's Word and they also cannot judge God's people. Just

like a blind man can't judge a painting, and a deaf man can't judge a musical, the natural man can't discern spiritual truth in God's people.

He then quotes from Isaiah 40:13 to prove his point. *Who has known the mind of the Lord?* This is a rhetorical question. No one except the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:10).

When the Spirit helps us discern spiritual truth, we actually have God's thoughts on the matter. We have "the mind of Christ." We have the mind of Christ as the Spirit illuminates the truth of the gospel and Scripture to our understanding. What a help! What a comfort! What an encouragement!

So let's get back to where we began. If the Holy Spirit is actively doing these wonderful things in our lives and church, why would we ever be afraid of Him? Why would we ignore Him? 1 Corinthians calls us to realize the glorious role the Spirit has in all that God does within us. The Spirit is central to everything!

How We Can Grow as People of the Spirit

Learn

Have you ever known someone and the more you got to know them, the more you liked them? The more I know about the Spirit, the more there is to love and adore. Today is just a glimpse. Corinthians will have more to say including how He dwells in us, how He gifts us for service and His role in salvation. The Holy Spirit is a person like that. He is not scary. He is here as our divine Helper, Teacher, and Encourager.

Ask Him to do His good work in us

I find it helpful when I pray to ask the Spirit to do what I know God's will is for Him to do. In confession, I ask Him to convict. In intercession, I ask Him to comfort and heal. In my own life I ask Him to "fill me"/"control me" and my attitudes. These are all things the Spirit is on a mission to do in us. It's kind of like asking someone to do what you know they want to do. Ask me to golf, play basketball, eat a fruit pie, or watch ESPN, and I'm all over it. I am predisposed to say yes to all those things. Ask the Spirit to do what He is here to do in the first place. That's a prayer the Spirit delights to answer.

Please Him

Our relationship with the Spirit is personal. The Scripture says that we can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Both of these hinder His good work in us, not because He is unable, but because we are unwilling. Paul is about to say to the Corinthians, *You are people of the Spirit but you're sure not acting like it.* People of the Spirit want to please the Spirit and bear His good fruit in their lives (Galatians 5:16ff.).

Worship Him

He is God. Therefore, He is to be worshipped. Worship Him in prayer, worship Him in song, and worship Him by living in such a way that pleases Him. He is always with us. He is God's active presence in this world. Without Him, there is no empowerment for ministry or evangelism. With Him, we shine in this dark world as *People of the Spirit*.

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