

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 2:14-16

**Title:** Understood by No One

**Truth:** The believer is blessed to understand spiritual things; the unbeliever cannot understand spiritual things, nor the believer who adheres to them.

**Date/Location:** Sunday March 1, 2020 at FBC

## Introduction

1 Corinthians 2:14-16: But the natural man does not receive **the things** of the Spirit of God, for **they** are foolishness to him; nor can he know **them**, because **they** are spiritually discerned.

<sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly judged* by no one.

<sup>16</sup> For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Nearly 20 years ago, I wrote the following in connection to verse 15: "The spiritual man judges these things. Simply put, the spiritual man is the man with the Spirit. He can examine and discern spiritual things by virtue of the Spirit's teaching ministry." Let's study it a bit more in detail. We are going to travel around the concepts in the text at least a twice.

## I. Two Kinds of People, v. 14-15

- A. Natural man, beginning of verse 14. He is "soulish," the default condition of every human being.
- B. Spiritual man = the one who is spiritual, beginning of verse 15. This simply means, as I said above, that he has the indwelling/teaching/guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit active in his life. He is saved, because every saved person has this ministry of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9).

The truth of God is the "things" that Paul is speaking of and which are bolded above in 2:14-15. When faced with this truth, there are two ways that it can be appraised or responded to:

## II. The Response of the Natural Man, v. 14

- A. **Does not receive** the things of God's Spirit. Why? (Notice the "for" in verse 14). Because he considers them foolishness. He does not welcome or embrace the truth because he appraises it to be idiotic.
- B. Even worse, he **cannot know** the things of the God's Spirit. Why? (again, notice the "for.") Because they are discerned by means of the Spirit. They are "studied" or "examined" or "appraised" or "understood" or

“evaluated” by means of the Spirit. If you don’t have the ministry of God’s Spirit, then obviously you cannot discern those things by means of the Spirit. And He is the only means, so therefore it is impossible for the natural man to understand the things of God truly. This explains so much of what we see in the world today.

- C. **Illustration:** Let us suppose that you cannot properly appraise the theory of relativity without knowing calculus. So, if you don’t know calculus, you *cannot* understand or evaluate Einstein’s theory. It’s that simple.
- D. **Application.** Of what kind of people does Paul speak here? The natural man is the person without the Spirit. So we could conveniently say, “Well, I’m not that person. I’m a person with the Spirit; I’ve made a profession of faith. I’m OK with God.” But let us approach it from a different angle. Do you receive the things of the Spirit of God? When someone speaks to you the word of God, do you receive it humbly as the word which saves your soul (James 1:21)? Do you embrace it as divine wisdom? Do you unreservedly commit to obey it? If not, then you may in fact be in the camp you don’t want to think you are in. Does the prospect of actually DOING God’s word seem to be somewhat foolish to you? Do the things of God seem hard to grasp and accept? If so, then you may be more “natural” than you realize. We too easily deceive ourselves to think that we are better than we are. We may be the natural man, unsaved. Or, we may be succumbing to too much natural that is left in our sin nature. Either way, we have to cry to God for help and resolve to rebuke the soul of rebellion against our Creator.

### III. The Response of the Spiritual Man, v. 15a

- A. Notice the underlined words in verses 14 and 15. They come from the same Greek verb. NASB is a good translation:

14: because they are spiritually appraised.

15: appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man.

The “judge” translation arises because there is a judicial flavor here. What does that mean? When a believer is “examined” by an outsider, there is a negative connotation to the result of that exam. The unbeliever cannot properly appraise or evaluate the believer and the truth he holds because he does not have the Spirit of God. If they do not properly understand it, they certainly cannot pass judgment regarding it. They are disqualified from doing so. Therefore, the unbeliever cannot understand or appraise the believer. If the unbeliever were to be so inclined, he could not criticize the believer either, precisely because he does not

stand on a cognitive ground where he can validly do so. “The natural man does not even have the ability to sift the facts.”<sup>1</sup> Much less can he make a proper appraisal of those facts and pass judgment based on those facts, as to the condition of the spiritual person.

**Related situation:** When you are tempted to comment on something, think first if you know the relevant facts to be able to do so wisely. If you do not know what you are talking about, don’t confidently think you can pass judgment about the situation. Hold your tongue, and speculation.

B. Technical details: the voice of the verbs:

14: they are spiritually appraised = passive voice: the things of God can only be appraised properly by means of the Holy Spirit. He is the ultimate “appraiser.”

15: appraises all things, = active voice: the person who has been transformed by God can properly understand the things of God.

15: he himself is appraised by no man = passive voice: the believer cannot be understood properly by the unbeliever.

C. The spiritual man appraises all the things. He is totally different than the natural man. He can take the truth of God and examine it. He can profit from such a study. **Biblical illustration:** Acts 17:11 uses the same verb of the Bereans who “examined the Scriptures” to determine if what Paul was saying was true. They were turning things over in their minds, comparing what they were taught with Scripture, understanding it properly, evaluating it, appraising it, etc.

**Other uses:** 1 Cor. 10:25, 27 uses the verb about “inquiry” into the origin of meat in the market. A similar use is found in 1 Cor. 4:3 and 9:3.

This text doesn’t mean that the saved person judges *all* things, as if contrary to Matt. 7:1. The “all things” is contextually limited to the things of the Spirit of God, that is, the truth of God. It would be more natural to the sense of the text to translate “all things” as “all these things (the things we are talking about in this paragraph).” By the extension of application, the person who understands the things of God can in fact evaluate things in the world by the correct standard. He has the tools he needs to evaluate what is going on “out there” in the world.

D. The person with the Spirit does not lose his mind or cognitive abilities. He retains all of his faculties. The Spirit never works contrary to the fruit of

---

<sup>1</sup> Liberty Commentary on the New Testament, 1978, p. 381.

self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Instead, the believer's cognitive abilities are enhanced with the interpretive and applicational power of the Spirit and the information provided in Scriptural revelation.

- E. **Application.** How does the Christian then look at the things of God? We look at them with a careful appraisal. We find them precious. We find them applicable to our lives. We find them obligatory upon us. We see them as teaching us and holding us accountable. They resonate within us because our spirit is led by God's Spirit, the Author and Communicator of divine truth. We set about immediately to obey what we read.

#### **IV. The Response of the Natural Man to the Spiritual Man, v. 15b**

**“yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one.”**

- A. **He himself** refers to the spiritual man. He is “evaluated” or “appraised” by no one. I believe the “no one” refers to unbelievers—remember, there are two kinds of people. Granted, two believers can in fact share a mutual understanding of the truth of God, and one can help the other, and they can understand each other. But an unbeliever cannot share a mutual understanding with the believer.
- B. When it comes to the natural unsaved man, he cannot grasp a saved person's life or mindset or belief system. He is un-equipped to make such an evaluation. Remember, these things are foolishness to him, so he looks at the believer's life and thinks “that's folly.”
- A person without the same Spirit as you have will find you to be a mystifying person. Why don't you run after the same flood of evil as they do? Why don't you have similar values when it comes to money or power or pleasure or whatever? But if they were to receive the gift of God's Spirit, they would understand immediately.
- C. So not only does the natural man have an inability to understand spiritual *truth*, he has an inability to understand spiritual *people* because of their relationship to that truth and to the Spirit who gives and teaches it.
- D. Here is where the nuance of judgment comes into the picture. The natural person cannot understand the spiritual person, and therefore he certainly cannot make a proper judgment about him. But this is because he is not appraising the situation properly from the beginning.

#### **V. The Reason the Natural Man Cannot Appraise the Spiritual Man, v. 16**

- A. Verse 16 opens with “for.” This word in the Greek text often indicates that an explanation is forthcoming, and such is the case here. The

connection is this: the spiritual person cannot be properly evaluated by the unsaved person *because...*

- B. The quotation of Isaiah 40:13 then explains why such an appraisal cannot be made: “For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’” The truth is expressed by means of a rhetorical question.
- C. In our case, the question makes the point that no one knows the mind of the Lord in such a way that that person could instruct the Lord. There is a sense in which that is absolutely true for all humanity: none of us can instruct the Lord as to how He should think or run His universe. I believe then that in this context, the assertion is made specifically regarding the unbeliever (the “no one” who can properly evaluate the believer). The person who does not have the Spirit of God has no hope of understanding the mind of the Lord and even less hope of being able to advise God. The unsaved person cannot “appraise” or “judge” God in the sense of evaluating God’s thoughts and plans and giving Him counsel.
- E. In a similar way, the unbeliever cannot appraise the believer. It is because of the believer’s close connection to God, having a share of God’s Spirit and thus the mind of Christ, that makes it impossible for the unsaved to critically evaluate and, yes, even judge, the believer. Remember that those who are in Christ have Christ’s Spirit (Romans 8:9). They know much of the things of Christ, because the Spirit has revealed those things to us (2:10). This puts them closer to God, and moves them very far away in condition from the unbeliever. The Christian is so much different in belief and practice and philosophy and ability to understand the mind of God that the unbeliever cannot grasp it. The believer is so close to God as to be substantially like God in that “no one” can instruct him.

Another thing that unbelievers attempt to do is to instruct the believer. He may tell him that his morality is immoral, or that he needs to change his beliefs<sup>2</sup>, or that he needs to come up to modern standards, or that he must be more tolerant and loving. They presuppose that they have the ability to instruct the believer in Christ. This is pride on the part of the one who does not follow Christ. He is unqualified to appraise, much less criticize or instruct.

- F. Who knows the mind of the Lord? The believing person does. “We have the mind of Christ.” We do not know God’s mind completely, to be sure,

---

<sup>2</sup> Hillary Clinton at the 2015 Women in the World Summit: “deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed.” [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com). The context was about domestic violence and reproductive health care.

but we know it in a way entirely above what the unbeliever can attain. Because of this, the believer is no more subject to the appraisal/criticisms/judgments/instruction of the unbeliever than God is! Marvel at this, dear believer, that you share in the mind of Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Paul and the other apostles were given a special manifestation of God's Spirit to know the things of God. They spoke and wrote those things as revelatory tools using spiritual words to communicate spiritual meaning. The same Spirit teaches His people, so that they can appraise spiritual things. But not unbelievers. There is a fundamental inability and incompetency to do so. In addition, there is a lack of interest on their part to truly examine the things of God.

Let us be thankful for what God has done, giving us the ability to understand the gospel and the interconnected system of truths that surrounds and support it. The Lord has given us an understanding (1 John 5:20). The Lord opens the eyes of His people to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). The Lord has opened our hearts to obey the gospel, like He did for Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14).

Thinking in theological terms, we speak of this gift under the heading of the Spirit's work in regeneration and illumination. This gift is so tremendous that it makes all other so-called "(miraculous) gifts of the Spirit" small by comparison.

MAP