

“Things of the Spirit”
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15 October 2023
Texts 1 Cor. 2:13-15

1 Cor. 2:13 **Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, [a]combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.** 14 But [b]a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually [c]discerned appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one¹.

In Spurgeon’s sermon #407 on this text, he elects to skip over the difficulties that reside in certain portions of the reading. For instance 13c **combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words**. Our footnote offers an alternative: **interpreting spiritual things to spiritual men**. Both renderings are improvements on the difficult Greek words: Comparing spiritual things with spiritual - πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες *pneumatikōis pneumatika sugkrinontes*. They are “better” because *explaining, or interpreting* spiritual truths is very different—it is showing an intent to “open, unfold and explain.” Well, when we stop to ponder the bare meaning of compare, *which we seldom do*, we soon realize that there is more to v. 13c than initially meets the eye. What’s plainer in the Greek plainer than is obvious *in the English* leaps out at us. **The words that we** (the apostles) **speak, taught by the Spirit** (i.e. are divinely inspired) are meant, or intended to explain to us the great things of God, or, the great truths of the eternal gospel. And we know what those things, as revealed to those (the church, the congregation of the regenerate saints) spiritually empowered to hear, receive and believe them, are! They are the pardon of sin, justification, sanctification, divine favor and protection, and the hope of eternal life (Barnes). John Gill adds as matters of grace, the gift of God’s own Son, a justifying righteousness, remission of sins, adoption and eternal; life—“all which were provided for them in the council and covenant of peace . . . given freely in Christ before the world began; for there is not only an eternal purpose to bestow these gifts, in the mind of God, and a promise of them in the covenant, but a real donation of them to them, as considered in Christ so early: besides God gave his Son, and Christ gave himself for them before they knew anything of the matter; and therefore must be unknown to them until made known by the Spirit of God, who is sent unto them and into their hearts for this purpose, to make them known, which he does by showing them this grace.” All of this in the one Greek word, συγκρίνοντες². [*synkrinontes* Strong’s 4793e]!

¹Footnotes

- a. 1 Corinthians 2:13 Or *interpreting spiritual things for spiritual men*
- b. 1 Corinthians 2:14 Or *an unspiritual*
- c. 1 Corinthians 2:14 Or *examined*

² **4793** *sygkrínō* (from **4862** /*sýn*, “identified with” and **2919** /*krínō*, “to judge”) – properly, judge *together*, i.e. *closely compare* (discriminate).

4793 /*sygkrínō* (“judging together”) is only used three times in the NT: *positively* in 1 Cor 2:13, and twice *negatively* in 2 Cor 10:12. Positively, **4793** /*sygkrínō* (“closely compare”) means grasping truths *combinatively* as they are “*fitly joined*” into one entity, i.e. where each is understood *in terms of the other* (WP, 1 Cor 2:14). [**4793** /*sygkrínō* (“comparative

And that is not all, this text contains evidence of the personality and personhood of both the Spirit and of God; a coequality of being, or unified existence. And there is a basis for the divine inspiration of the words of Scripture. Furthermore the doctor of all this being a real donation—things unknown until accomplished and bestowed (as is gifts given and benefits acquired). The truth of an everlasting gospel is laid out before us as part of a whole course of instruction/or as God revealing the deep things of Himself, his character and nature. Things that were formerly mysteries are now proclaimed as great things imparted to the Church and this is done in language comprehensible to us—celestial language in human words because God designed/ordained an accurate expression of truth, supervised its composition, superintended its transmission and supernaturally protected its content. If we grant that words are signs of thoughts and, are in possession of honest minds, we know our thoughts and language can be expressed as one! Our words can have integrity and truthfulness, too. However, there remains this caveat, only the born-again, or regenerate possess a taste for truth, and a hunger for the pure word. And even they want an educated tongue to taste what is true, and to judge the quality of its flavor. The redeemed of the Lord have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to believe God! Unless we are changed, rendered capable by the Spirit of God to see, hear, taste and believe the goodness of the Lord, we cannot enter into it at all.

This passage is so rich with all of these things, that we can feel overwhelmed and bewildered. Yes, challenged and confused. But the great things of God should drive us to our knees and to anthems of gratitude and praise. Who has a God like unto our God?! A Savior like our Lord?!

All of this clarification, and elucidation contributes to the clearing of the ground on the positive side of things. We also have to clear the ground of demonic interferences. All hindrances have to go, then we can proceed with conversations about the things of God, things of the Spirit.

So, I should relate that this past week I have experienced such serious brushes with carnality as a Christian might always hope to evade! Many occurred at the "Creation Museum" and "The Ark Encounter" while I was on vacation and a number more occurred around Mary Deming's "Memorial Service" on Columbus Day. Perfectly normal and ordinary, I assure you. However all of that has left me with a ton of things to ponder and process/debrief from.

Sunday evening, after prayer meeting, I began sermon preparation by downloading and studying Charles Spurgeon's sermon #407: "The Apostle Paul only knows two classes of men—natural and spiritual." That will be our major focus this morning. Is this dichotomy of the world into the natural and spiritual verifiable and useful? Does it help the believer understand the world we are in so that we might walk more wisely, advisedly? If so, it would be excellent to know the proof(s) of Paul's assertion. Secondly, it would be helpful to know the practicality of this truth. So, this morning we will be examining 1 Cor. 2:13-15 for its *rationality* (Does it accord with observable

evaluating") results in "*unified* understanding" as elements in a comparison are grasped as similar or dissimilar.]

reality?) and for its applicability (Does it assist us in living our lives as we interact with the **mixed congregation of the world** and everything in it?).

Let's get started. Behind the text, lies an exertion of the absolute necessity of regeneration—as work of the Holy Spirit. In order to be a spiritual person, you must, as Jesus says, **Be born again, born from above, or become a new creature in Christ**. We may, by our best efforts, make ourselves the best of natural men: most patriotic, sober, discreet, kind and benevolent of philanthropists but we cannot turn ourselves into spiritual persons! Natural men can be good, even moral persons and not be regenerate. This does not mean they are sinless, innocence, or originally “good.”

Secondly, as we are powerless *to regenerate ourselves*, we are powerless to regenerate any one else—as impossible as it is to create another heaven, or world, or to rival our God in majesty, wisdom, power or love! ***It is something only God can do! And our great praise is that God does indeed do just such a work thoroughly and often.*** When I say great praise, I am alluding to the kind of praise set forth in Psalm 103:1-5. Regeneration is as great a work as the first creation, or in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! That magnitude of power, -wholly divine, is absolutely holy. Seasons of refreshing, or revivals, as we used to say, remind us of this, of this inescapable necessity. **No one cometh to the Father unless the Father draws him!**

Regeneration grates on carnal ears. But it actually is “a trumpet call,” as Spurgeon says, to awaken the spiritually dead who are chosen but haven't heard full and faithful preaching of this doctrine! Notably, George Whitfield preached the three R's: Ruin, Regeneration and Redemption—the wholly, helplessly, hopelessly and eternal ruin of our fallen humanity. Then he preached upon the regeneration by which a ruined creature is rendered new, a new creature in Christ! And he closed with Man redeemed by the precious atoning blood of Christ and not by works, deeds of the law, rituals and ceremonies, prayers or resolutions! **Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!** (John 3:3) The Word does not say “enter here” but “see” the kingdom; it is as if he were one sensorially deprived.

And we, if these things ring true to us, are evidence that we may take comfort in that very apprehension *that we are born again!* “Do you take by faith Jesus Christ to be your Savior this morning?” Then be blessed, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you! Do you agree with divine election, assured redemption, the finished working immutable love of Christ? Know that the natural man does not agree with this, only the redeemed of the Lord do so. In fact the natural man considers the things of the Spirit **foolishness**. This is a great truth of Scripture!

We shall now explore how this rejection of **the things of God** cannot be because they are foolish, for they are not so. Therefore we shall demonstrate that the reason for this rejection is found in himself alone. And finally we shall review the practical implications for believers as they interact with the natural men and woman who surround us.

In himself. By observation, we may assert that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit. We do not mean only the drunkard, the addicted, or the debauched natural men—although it is true that they do not—but also included are the more intelligent, enlightened, educated, trained and refined natural men do not, cannot and will not comprehend such spiritual things. No matter how amiable, well-bred and parented they are, no matter how well-placed by providence (socially, financially), no matter how patriotic, civic-minded and self-denying and benevolent they may be, they are excluded by virtue of being natural men! Here are some observations: how many natural men are there, who, despite being good men, vehemently oppose the spiritual things of God? Even to describing them as myth, story, fables and lies! They cannot imagine how anyone with any intelligence could affirm the turn, or reality of such things. They refer to religion as backwards, retrograde, ignorant and superstitious—and imagine that they are breaking the chains of priest craft and loosening the fetters of tradition. *They are too highly evolved, a key term of natural superiority to stoop to such delusions—“they (religions) are okay for those who need to believe in such things.” “It may be true to you, but not to me.”* There are even some, among these “naturals,” who live under a profession of religion, who are active debunkers of the spiritual things that religions teach! Some of these are even clergymen who actively deny the truths they once claimed to have received by the Holy Spirit. And some few of this later group are avowed atheists, infidel lecturers who act like wolves in sheep’s clothing. They, under a theological cover, advantage this situation, denying the power of godliness itself! Some are sincere, others hypocritical. Many scientific minds, great inquirers after truth and inquisitive in the realms of knowledge, who have entered the seventh heaven of human wisdom, openly demonstrate that they cannot receive spiritual things, things pertaining to the Kingdom of God by determined opposition and hostility, enmity against the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. They summons “scientific facts” against the truths of revelation in a very ancient history of opposition. Not only do they not receive the things of God they reject them out of hand—on media shows, in podcast, in info-videos.

Practical Consequences. When we become aware that someone we are interacting with can’t get on board with the spiritual realities, with the things of God that make absolute sense to us we can stop talking at them and start interceding for them. Pray for their hearts to be softened, their ears to be unstopped and their eyes opened. Unless they be born again, there’s little use addressing their spiritual condition, their sin, immorality, confusion or depravity. They both cannot, and will not understand.

- Internalize the necessity of regeneration.
- Acknowledge that by self-effort one can become a better natural man; but only God can transform someone into a spiritual person. Pray for that!
- Accept that no man, no person on earth can alter another person; but God can.
- Unless the Spirit of God makes us new, it does not happen.

- Take comfort if these things make sense to you—that is an indication that you are redeemed, born-again. Pray for renewal, pray for receptivity and pray for saving grace to fall on, and visit your friend, neighbor, or natural family member.

Amen