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The Natural vs. Spiritual Man

If you'd turn to 1 Cor 2 the first thing I'd like to say by way of introduction is that the difficulty with this passage is staying with Paul's argument. Outside of that the passage is not too difficult. But it will challenge you to put aside your preconceived notions of what it means and just let Paul speak.

Backing up to 1 Cor 2:6-13 what I've tried to show is that the "we" is a reference to Paul, Apollos and Peter. By extension we would say it refers to all prophets and apostles who were the conduits of NT revelation. But as far as the Corinthian's were concerned it refers to Paul, Apollos and Peter. So when Paul says in verse 6, "Yet we do speak wisdom" he's referring to himself, Apollos and Peter. We do speak wisdom as prophets of God. But it's not "a wisdom...of this age nor of the rulers of this age..." that is to say, the wisdom that we speak is not sourced in this world. But if it's not sourced in this world then what is its source? Verse 10 answers, "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." That is to say that the things of God are inaccessible by human reason, they are impenetrable, they are walled off, so to speak, and unless someone from the other side of the wall comes over and reveals to man wisdom from the other side, we can't know it. But graciously God has revealed Himself to prophets by means of the Spirit of God. And explanation for why this was necessary in order to know anything about God is verse 11, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." That is, the thoughts of God are inaccessible unless the Spirit of God reveals them just as your thoughts are inaccessible to me unless you reveal them. **Now**, verse 12, **we have received not the spirit of the world.** Paul introduces **the spirit of the world**, *to pneuma to kosmou*. The *pneuma* or **spirit**, concretely is breath or wind but it came metaphorically to refer to

ideas, thoughts and concepts that permeate our world. And his point is that the ideas and concepts that he and Apollos and Peter received did not come from **the world**. The **world** being the system that is ruled by Satan. He says we didn't get our ideas from the world that is being controlled by Satan. That is not the source of what we taught you. The world and the rulers of this world know nothing about God because God is on the other side of a wall, impenetrable by human reason as autonomous. Our ideas do not come from this side of the wall Paul says, but from the other side. Our ideas come from **the Spirit who is from God**, He came to us prophets from the other side of the wall, He searches the depths of God, He knows the thoughts of God and He has revealed them to us. Otherwise we would know nothing about God. **But we have received...the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God**, that is, the word of God. He's referring to NT revelation; He's talking about the new revelation that was coming to build the NT canon. Paul, Apollos and Peter were recipients of this divine revelation and if the Spirit had not revealed these things to these prophets of God then we could not know anything about God. So why, oh why Corinthian's are you appealing to Greek rhetoric and Greek philosophy, all things of this world which can in no way tell you anything about God. Why are you accommodating to that because what we have received is very much superior to that, we have received divine revelation by means of the Spirit of God who knows the thoughts of God. Now these things have been freely given to us. That's the word for grace, the fact that God has revealed these new things to us, that were heretofore a mystery, is purely by grace. God is not obligated to reveal Himself to us by His Spirit, but He has chosen to do so in His eternal plan and so now that they are revealed they are ours, they are for our joy. The secret things, those remain hidden in God, but the things revealed are for us and for our children. These things God has graciously revealed to prophets by His Spirit and then were transferred to the Corinthians as the prophets taught them. Now we have access to the prophets through the closed canon of Scripture. And without this canon of Scripture you know nothing about God. You could sit here for 10,000 years and know nothing more after 10,000 years as you knew the first year. Unless God reveals it through the prophets we know nothing about God. Paul says, that is where we got the information. God sent the Spirit of God from the other side of the barrier and He revealed these things to us.

Verse 13, **Which things we also speak**, this is what he said we do in 2:6, take a glance at that, “we speak wisdom,” that is things revealed to us by the Spirit of God. Things which if you turn to 4:1 you will see made them stewards. They had a responsibility to dispense these things to others. He says, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Now one who is a steward of the mysteries of God is one who has been entrusted with the word of God and he has the responsibility to dispense it to others. It was not the prophe’s job to keep the revelation all to himself and hide it away, but to speak it to others so they might enjoy the things God has given to us all for our joy.

So now if you come back to 2:13 you see what Paul is saying. He’s saying we dispensed these things, that’s what we were sent to do, dispense of the things that we freely received from God, knowledge of the Holy One. These things **we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom**, that is, not by the rhetoric of Greek sophistry, stay with the argument Paul is making. Paul is still following the argument through from chapter 1 where he condemned the Corinthians use of Greek sophistry to proclaim the gospel, so here he is still working with that idea, **we speak** wisdom but **not in words taught by human wisdom**, not what you would learn from a professional Greek sophist who was trained in the art of persuasion, no, **but in those taught by the Spirit**. That’s the Holy Spirit and here he is referring to divine revelation, the Holy Spirit is the revealer of Scripture, and all he is saying is we told you the Scriptural story, we declared to you the things recorded in the word of God.

If we went back to the Book of Acts and saw the Scriptural story Paul told Gentiles you would see that he emphasized the truths of Gen 1-11 to Gentiles. He would tell them about how God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and that since He is Lord of heaven and earth He does not dwell in temples made with human hands, nor is He served by Human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all men life and breath and all things. And how He made from the one man Noah all nations of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; therefore we ought not to think that God is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man, no,

you do not form God, God formed you. And God has overlooked your human ignorance and now He is declaring to all men everywhere that they should repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, a man who was publicly revealed as raised from the dead. That is the Scriptural story Paul would tell to Gentiles, it is the story that starts with the God of Creation and History and ends with the Jesus Christ, the Firstborn from the Dead. And Paul's point in following this method was simply to put himself and his great intellect out of the picture. Paul was a very brilliant man but he didn't appeal to his intellect as autonomous. He says in 2:3 "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling," that is I did not depend on myself, I merely preached the Scriptural story. How could I add anything to that and make it better? Verse 4, "and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," Verse 5, why? "so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." Paul said, get me out of the picture, this is not about me, this is about what God has done in history, so I present to you His revelation, what He has done. And when he did this before a Gentiles audience he would emphasize the portion of the Bible that the Holy Spirit had revealed to all Gentile nations before they paganized in the days after the Flood and he would cite their paganization and then the answer to their problem which is the crucified and risen Christ.

However, if his audience were Jewish then Paul would do the same type of thing but he would emphasize the truths of Gen 12-Malachi, since those sections dealt particularly with the Jewish people beginning with Abraham. And he would say, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. ¹⁸"For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹"When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—*all of which took* about four hundred and fifty years. ²⁰"After these things He gave *them* judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹"Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²²"After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' ²³"From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

²⁴after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵“And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not *He*. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ ²⁶“Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. ²⁷“For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled *these* by condemning *Him*. ²⁸“And though they found no ground for *putting Him to death*, they asked Pilate that He be executed. ²⁹“When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰“But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. ³²“And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, ³³that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’ ³⁴“*As for the fact* that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY *and SURE blessings* OF DAVID.’ ³⁵“Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, ‘YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.’ ³⁶“For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; ³⁷but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. ³⁸“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. ⁴⁰“Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon *you*: ⁴¹“BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.’ ”

Now all this I have just spoken to you is nothing more than the Scriptural story, and that’s what Paul means in verse 13 I declared to you words **taught by the Spirit**. That’s the Scriptural story starting with what God had done in the OT in preparation for what He has now done in the NT, what He has done in Christ, the culmination of the OT, the One to whom the OT looked, He is the One to whom it all pointed, it looked to Him and now He has come

and He has been crucified for you. Christ the wisdom of God, Christ the power of God.

Then he explains at the end of verse 13 what he and Apollos and Peter were sent to do, **combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words***, the point there and you can mark out *thoughts* and *words* because you see they are in italics meaning they are not in the original text, it just says combining spiritual with spiritual in the original. And what he means by spiritual here is divine revelation, combining OT revelation with NT revelation. That's what He means, he says we are prophets who are taking the OT revelation and combining it with the NT revelation that has now come in the person and work of Christ. Look at how wonderful a story the Spirit of God has revealed to us, He has shown us how the OT, which never solved our problem of – Righteousness has come to a head in a real solution to our problem now, in the +Righteousness generated by the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we see how it all goes together, now we see how what the OT never answered but sort of left us hanging there wondering where is +Righteousness going to come from, I see the problem from the OT but I don't see the answer. Paul says we reveal to you God's answer in the NT. And we're putting that all together for you, combining spiritual with spiritual, the OT with the NT adjoined. Look at the wonderful plan of God for you, look at how God has answered your problem in a most startling way. He has sent forth His own Son as a second Adam, born of a virgin, both truly God and truly man in hypostasis and He has lived a perfect life, being tempted in all things as we in kenosis, yet for the joy set before Him on the cross He endured all these things without sin and He was raised again by God. Now He is the One whom God has chosen and who is the heir of all things and who is the first piece of a new universe and the appointed judge of humanity. This is the one we preached to you, this is how it all comes together. Do you see that, **combining spiritual with spiritual**, old truths with new truths? These are the things of the Spirit of God.

Now verse 14 and we come to the responses. How have men responded to the things of the Spirit of God? How have they responded to the Scriptural story of history? There are four responses or kinds of men and they have various characteristics. So I want to put up a chart to help us mark out the four men and their characteristics and then we'll go into the first man.

Kind of Man	Verses	Eternal Status	Growth Status	Dominated By	Source of Wisdom
Natural (<i>psuchikos</i>)	2:14	Unsaved	--NA--	Flesh	World (Human Reason)
Of flesh (<i>sarkinos</i>)/ Infant (<i>nepios</i>)	3:1-2	Saved	New Believer Immature	Flesh	World (Human Reason)
Fleshly (<i>sarkikos</i>)	3:3	Saved	Old Believer Immature	Flesh	World (Human Reason)
Spiritual (<i>pneumatikos</i>) /Mature (<i>teleios</i>) /Mind of Christ (<i>noun Christou</i>)	2:6, 15-16; 3:1	Saved	Old Believer Mature	Spirit	Word of God (Divine Revelation)

The first man is 2:14, the natural, soulish or *psuchikos* man; he's unsaved, he's dominated by fleshly, earthly, demonic wisdom. The second man is 3:1, the men of flesh or *sarkinos*, also called infants in Christ or *nepios*. They are clearly believers, said to be "in Christ," but they are new believers and are immature, they are still dominated by the flesh and that's understandable, they just came to Christ, every believer starts off an infant in Christ. The third man is 3:3, the fleshly or *sarkikos*, different Greek word but same meaning as the third man, he's also saved but the difference with him is that he's no longer an infant in Christ, he's been a believer for some time but he hasn't grown, he is still fleshly, he still thinks there's some stock in the world and it's wisdom so his basic orientation is the world. That's the Corinthians, they are classified in this third category by the apostle Paul. The fourth man is 2:6, 15, 16 and 3:1, he's the spiritual or *pneumatikos* man, also he's the man in 2:6 who is called mature or *teleios* and in 2:16 he is the man who has the mind of Christ, the *noun Christou* man, he is also saved, he's been a believer for some time but he has grown to maturity and his life is dominated by the Spirit, his orientation is basically to the word of God, that's what it means to have the mind of Christ.

So those are the four responses to the revelation of God, some men reject altogether, they are natural, others believe the revelation of God and they are

split into three categories, those of flesh or infants who still are on milk doctrine so they haven't had time to mature yet, then those who are fleshly, they've been believers for awhile but they haven't matured, they should have matured but they haven't and then the spiritual and they are on solid doctrine, they are mature believers.

To start let's look at the man in 2:14, the natural man. What's his response to the word of God? **But 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 appraised.** Now this will always be the response of the natural man unless the Spirit of God does something to initiate with this person and override his fleshly use of human reason and make it subject to divine revelation. He will always reject unless the Spirit of God calls him. Now the first thing here is just a statement of fact about the **natural** or "soulish" man. In the Greek he's the *psuchikos* man. Now the key attribute of this man is he is earthly-minded. Turn to James 3:15. He thinks in terms of the things of this world. And he does not accept the ideas of the Spirit of God which are heavenly things, things from the other side of the wall about God. So when you think of the soulish man the key idea is that he is earthly minded and not heavenly minded. James talks about him in 3:15. He's talking about certain sin patterns, bitter jealousy and selfish ambition and he says in verse 15, this is where it's coming from. "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic." So James' point and Paul's point is that there is an earthly wisdom; this is the wisdom of the natural or *psuchikos* man, he operates according to demonic ideas that are spawned by Satan and his hordes who rule this world.

Now if we come back to 1 Cor 2:14, the first statement about this man is merely a statement of fact, **A natural man** and I want to refer to him as the *psuchikos* man so that's the way we're going to refer to him. **But a psuchikos man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**, that is he is not open to the Scriptural story beginning with the OT and culminating in the NT. He is not open minded with respect to the Scriptures, he is closed minded. Unbelievers like to claim that they are open-minded and we Christians are so closed-minded. Well, that's the pot calling the kettle black. They are not open-minded to **the things of the Spirit of God**. Now as a Christian my mind has been opened by the Holy Spirit to know truth, to

really understand, to have true knowledge. The natural man is always learning but never coming to knowledge. That's because knowledge is exclusively a Christian commodity. He learns things but he doesn't know the relationship of one fact to another fact and its place in the plan of God. And the reason is he doesn't believe there is a plan of God. A spiritual Christian at least has knowledge and the reason is because he knows there is a plan of God and that every fact and interpretation of a fact has been given its place by the plan of God.

But in any case we are now on the natural man not the spiritual man. Now the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. Why? For two reasons. First, **for they are foolishness to him**. The word of God is foolishness to an unbeliever. He is an earthly minded person so when confronted with a heavenly minded story, a story that is revealed from beyond earth by the Holy Spirit, it's interpreted as **foolishness** by **him**. And we've already seen this. Go back into chapter 1 where Paul said numerous times that the cross of Christ is foolishness to Gentiles. So it's the same argument coming up again. So we'll call this first reason the ethical hostility problem. Man is a sinner and therefore he's ethically at war with God. So when the message of God comes he doesn't like it because it says he's a rebel and that Christ is the only way and this is offensive to the **natural** man because it reminds him of his responsibility to God and he doesn't want to be reminded of that. Well, that's too bad. But that's reason number 1 for not accepting the word of God, ethical hostility to God.

The second reason he does not accept the things of the Spirit of God is ontological, it has to do with his nature or being as fallen in Adam. It's this that makes him earthly minded, only able to examine things here below. But the things of God Paul says **are spiritually appraised**, that is, the whole story of the word of God is spiritually inaccessible to the natural man. I would translate that word **appraised** as "inaccessible." He can't access the things of God. He insists on starting with human reason and submitting the Scriptural story to his human reason which he has made to be the bar of judgment. But the problem with this starting point is that his human reason is being controlled by his sinful flesh. Now we're going to get more into the flesh down in chapter 3. But the idea is that the flesh is hostile to God and it cannot submit to God. So man has reason. God created man with reason, reason is a tool, and as a tool it can be used either by the Spirit for good or by

the flesh for evil. It's like a gun, it can be used by a bad man to kill people or by a good man to protect people, but the gun is just a tool. Guns don't kill people, bad men kill people with guns, but good people protect people with guns. So guns aren't the issue, the kind of person is the issue. And the same thing is true with human reason. Human reason is a tool and it can be used by the Spirit to bring about wonderful systematization of truths about God or it can be used by the flesh to reject and rebel against God. And since the truths about God are spiritually inaccessible to the natural man then when he insists that he use his human reason to access those truths he finds they are inaccessible by that pathway. The flesh is not able to lead him in that heavenly direction. It requires a work of the Spirit from the heavenly direction working toward that man for him to come to salvation.

So with that said we have seen the first man, he's the **natural** man and he is unsaved, dominated by the flesh and the only wisdom he has is earthly, of this world and demonic, spawned by the ruler of this world.

In verse 15 we come all the way to the fourth man on our chart, **But he who is spiritual**, so it's a big contrast, he swings to the other end of the spectrum, these two are aliens to one another, actually the fourth man is partly alien to the other three men. Now let's look at what he is like. The spiritual man **appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one**. Let's very quickly help the translation by changing the word **appraises** and **appraised** to examines and examined. The point is that this man examines the Scriptures, **all things** refers to the Scriptures. You see this man in Berea, this is a Berean, he searches the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so, he takes the OT, and that was already a completed canon and he took the new revelation that was coming through the apostles and prophets and he compared it with the old, comparing and combining. So he's a student of the word of God. He's interested in this book. But notice the last expression, **yet he himself is examined by no one**. That is, it's not saying that people don't judge him, it's just that their judgment doesn't really matter because the standard by which they judge is not the standard of the word of God. And any standard that is not the word of God rests on nothing more than human opinion. It may be a human law generated by a legislature, but all human laws are subjected to the word of God for their validity or invalidity. Human law is not absolute, it's human opinion or human consensus, but that is not the measure of what is right and what is wrong. Only the word of God says

what is right and wrong. So the spiritual man says, you can examine me on some other standard that you've generated, but just know that it doesn't make a hill of beans difference to me because the only one who examines me is the Lord. His standards are what counts. Notice chapter 4:3, what does Paul say? "But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord." See, the spiritual man is not concerned about human standards. Now if someone confronts him with the Lord's standards, with the word of God, then he does care, he knows that is the authority and he must pay attention to that, but not to human standards.

Now verse 16 and here he quotes Scripture to support his claim that no one examines the spiritual man. **For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.** Now that's a quote from Isa 40:13 and he's applying it only to the spiritual man, this is not for all believers. All believers do not have the mind of Christ. The Corinthian's certainly do not have the mind of Christ. Having the mind of Christ is something that must be developed in a believer. For example, Paul says to the Romans, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." Now to have the mind of Christ requires examination of the mind of Christ which is revealed in the Scriptures. And you are never going to have the mind of Christ unless you study this book like a Berean.

Now verse 16 is saying even more though. Here is the spiritual man, he says no one examines me, meaning what we said before, no one on the basis of some human standard examines the spiritual man who is living according to God's standard. For, and Paul is explaining why here, **WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?**

In other words, for someone, whether believer or unbeliever to come along and judge a spiritual man on the basis of some other standard that a human being has originated is to have the audacity to judge the Lord, to try and instruct the Lord of glory. And Paul says no, you can't do that, there is no other standard in the universe, He is the final bar of judgment. The final bar of judgment is what the Lord says in His word not what some human thinks. And that is why you cannot judge a spiritual man, it just isn't valid. You are, when you judge, standing in mid-air, you have nothing to base it on but your

own finite peanut brain and that is subject to the Lord, so it has no validity whatsoever as a final standard. People don't create final standards, God does.

So those are the first two men, the natural man and the spiritual man. They're at opposite ends of the spectrum. Next time we'll deal with the two in between, the man of flesh and the fleshly, very similar but one is a new believer and so it's very understandable he needs mil, but the other is an older believer and so there's negligence involved. And that's where the Corinthian's are. So there is the necessity to grow as a Christian and if you don't grow there is room for exhortation to grow.

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