



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

1 Corinthians

For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:11

Paul is tying what he just said in with this thought. He has been writing about the wisdom of God which has been hidden and unknown to man until it was revealed by the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God had not revealed these things (which are now found in the proclamation of the prophets and apostles, and which speak of the work of Christ - all as recorded in Scripture) we never would have been able to discern them. They belonged alone to God, in His eternal mind.

To show us something more easily understandable, he uses the thoughts of the individual man as a comparison. Nobody can get truly get into another man's thoughts. All we can do is make deductions about what someone is thinking, but we can never know for sure the details and sum of his mind. The same is true with God. He has created, and we can make deductions about Him from His creation, but we can never fully attain to the thoughts of God - and we surely cannot speak for Him about what His thoughts are.

Only can the spirit in a man know the things of that man and in like manner, only the Spirit of God can know "the things of God." Unless the man reveals his thoughts to another, they remain his alone. As this is true with someone just like us, and it is true with all humans who have ever lived, how much more God! Unless God reveals His intentions to us we cannot ever probe those things which are hidden in Him.

Paul is going to continue with this thought in the verses ahead, but it is important to remember that what He has been speaking about, and what he will continue to speak about, is the message of the gospel. He is not indicating that we have something available to us that is unavailable to others. He is not saying that because we have the Spirit, we are able to obtain a level of spiritual knowledge that others cannot. Nor is he saying that we can now "speak for God" in prophetic utterances. He is clearly explaining how the message of the gospel was unknown until it was known and that it is God's incomparable way of bringing salvation to man.

Later, when speaking of those who are not in Christ, he will explain why they cannot perceive the gospel. It is not because they don't have it available to them, but because they don't have faith to receive it. When faith is exercised, they will receive the Spirit and the gospel will suddenly make sense.

Life application: Faith in the gospel is not a step into darkness, it is stepping into God's revealed light. This light is found in the Bible which contains the words of the prophets and apostles. These words proclaim Jesus Christ. The things of God necessary for salvation have been revealed by the Spirit of God to us. Let us continue to read and cherish this treasure of wisdom and love all our days.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
1 Corinthians 2:12

Paul just spoke of the Spirit of God being the only One who can truly know the things of God. Now he builds upon this, stating that "we have received." In the original sense, he is surely writing about himself and the other apostles as they received instruction concerning the work of God in Christ (the very subject he has been speaking about). In other words, the reception of the things of God was limited to the apostles who have then given us what they received. Through them, this was revealed to those who accepted the message and believed. When faith is exercised in the true gospel, the believer is then sealed with "the Spirit who is from God;" the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Therefore, Paul's "we" is ultimately referring to all true believers. What we receive "is not the spirit of the world." In this, he is probably thinking on two separate lines. The first is the Jew who was looking at the Scriptures from a worldly, kingly sense. Their idea of a Messiah was one who would deliver them from their enemies and set up a kingdom over the world in which they would be the head of the nations. They couldn't understand that "all are bound under sin" and therefore sin is the greatest enemy. Before the Messiah could reign as King, He had to suffer as the Servant.

The second line Paul is probably speaking of is the wisdom and philosophy of the Greek which looked for a rational, natural explanation for all things. Their knowledge excluded the thought of sin needing to be dealt with by God personally. Such knowledge could never understand the deep things of God which necessitated His divine intervention to reconcile us to Him. Along with the wisdom of the Greek was certainly the inclusion of all of the gentile systems which always look to self and to works for reconciliation with God. In all, the "spirit of the world" is at enmity with God.

But in His grace, God provides His Spirit to those who believe "that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." Again, as noted in previous verses, this is not speaking of divine inspiration of new things and prophetic utterances which people claim all the time in churches today. It is speaking about those things that were revealed through the apostles and given to us in Scripture. It is the word of God which tells of Jesus. Though lacking the sensation of charismatic churches, it is the Bible and only the Bible by which we are given insights into what God has done, is doing, and will do in the world. The apostles received the word directly from God; we receive the word directly from the Bible.

Life application: Ever since the completion of the Bible, people have continued to proclaim prophecies and claim that they have had dreams and visions concerning divine revelation from God. And yet, in those 2000 years, none of them have added anything of value to the truth of the Bible. Instead, they have been diversions away from biblical truth. Don't get swept up in the vain imaginings of others, but hold fast to what God has revealed. What more does He need to say?

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

1 Corinthians 2:13

Again, Paul continues to build on his previous thoughts. "These things" refers to the "the things that have been freely given to us by God" from the previous verse. The Spirit was upon the apostles, including Paul, for the reception of the word of God. In this, he shows that they were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they spoke out the message of Christ. Those words which were put to pen and compiled for us became the word of God, the Holy Bible.

It is this cherished book that is "not in words which man's wisdom teaches." No other book has its source directly in God. Instead they have their source in the created rather than the Creator; man's wisdom is involved. But those prophets and apostles whose work is included in the Bible "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

As "man's wisdom" is excluded, only the truth of God remains. It is true that the styles of the individual writers of the Bible come through, but each word was selected by God, moving harmoniously with the writer so that His perfect intent is realized. When a musician plays from a sheet of music, his style may come through, and yet the musical notes were each selected by the composer. If the musician is faithful to follow the score, then the style and intent of the composer will be known, despite who the musician is. So both the musician and the composer can be discerned at the same time.

If Eddie Van Halen were to play Bach, anyone who knew Van Halen's style could say, "That is Eddie Van Halen." At the same time, anyone who knew Bach's writing style could say, "That was written by Bach." In the Bible, man's wisdom is excluded, but the words of the divine Author and the style of the human writer remains. Thus the Bible can be, and is, the word of God.

Finally, in Paul's words today he says that this process is noted as "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." This is an immensely complex phrase which is highly debated concerning its exact meaning. Many possibilities exist as to how Paul's words are rightly translated. One possibility which seems appropriate based on the next verse would be "Explaining spiritual things to spiritual persons" (Adam Clarke). This will continue to be evaluated in verse 14.

Life application: God's word is sealed. The prophets and apostles have received God's revelation which has been recorded for us and which is our guide for life and conduct as Christians. Extra-biblical revelation is not only unnecessary, it would be a diversion away from the very word which God has given us. Don't be swayed by those who claim prophecies or "a word" from the Lord. The Lord has given us His word - did He somehow miss something? No!

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. 1 Corinthians 2:14

This is another highly abused verse within common Christian speech. It needs to be viewed from within the context given and with reasonable contemplation. Far too often, Christians will cite it as a demonstration of the impossibility of a non-believer being able to know, understand, or perceive anything found in the Bible. Likewise, they will cite it to demonstrate that they have access to all knowledge and are therefore authorities on the subject matter they desire to speak of. Both of these are immense misinterpretations of Paul's intent.

He has been speaking of the contrast between human wisdom and the wisdom of God (which is the work of God in Jesus Christ). He has demonstrated that His work - the cross, the resurrection, etc. is God's plan of salvation, something which is "foolishness" to those who reject this plan. To support this, he begins with "but." This is given as the contrast to those things "which the Holy Spirit teaches." The contrast is that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God." The natural man is the Greek term *psychikos de anthropos*. The word *psychikos* is descriptive of the natural or lower aspect of humanity. It is earthly rather than

heavenly. The word *pneumatikos* on the other hand is used to describe the spiritual aspect of man.

A great comparison of these two words is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul describes the contrast between the earthly and the spiritual man. In James' epistle, he uses the term to describe earthly wisdom -

"This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic."
James 3:15

Jude speaks in similar terms as well. Understanding that this is a state of the person, it should be noted that there are many Christians who act anything but spiritual. They have accepted Christ, but they aren't focused on Him as Lord through much of their walk. This is exactly what James is talking about in his letter. Therefore, Paul's words here cannot be taken as an example that Christians suddenly become the possessors of all spiritual knowledge, nor can it be used to say that non-believers have no ability to discern the contents of the Bible.

Instead, and what should be perfectly clear from the context, is that Paul is speaking of the very same matter he has been speaking of throughout the chapter (and even in the previous chapter). It is that the wisdom of God is displayed in the work of Jesus Christ. This is God's special revelation concerning the redemptive process. Those who believe that one can answer all things through natural revelation (what can be perceived through creation), logic, and philosophy will inevitably reject the work of Jesus. To them it is foolishness that God would save people in such a way as this.

This is what Paul is referring to. Such things "are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Only through the spiritual knowledge imparted to us by God can we know the truth of the gospel. The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets and apostles, testifying to the work of Jesus Christ. They in turn gave us the Bible to read, accept, and believe.

The problem with misinterpreting this verse as many people do, is that they suddenly act upon it as if they have all the spiritual insight they need and it is available to them by daily injections of Holy Spirit power. When in fact, what they have available to them is the Bible - given by the Holy Spirit. The Bible, however, is a big, complicated, and often hard to grasp book. It takes immense study, contemplation, meditation, and care to fully grasp - and in fact, no one can truly plumb its depths.

Study is hard work and it involves expanding one's mind, even to exhaustion. It is time-consuming and it requires much perseverance and dedication. These things are not now, nor have they ever been, very popular. Interestingly, many non-Christians - Jews, agnostics, and even professing atheists, know the Bible far better than most Christians. They discern many truths from it and they use it as a valuable source of knowledge and history. Because of this, it is obvious that Paul isn't speaking on the terms of general knowledge and ability to perceive Scripture. He is speaking on the truth of what Scripture ultimately proclaims - Jesus Christ crucified.

Life application: Care needs to be taken to always keep verses in their proper context. Sometimes a whole chapter, or even more, is needed to properly discern the intent of just one verse. Running ahead with a verse like 1 Corinthians 2:14 without keeping it in its intended context can only lead to a pretext. It is harmful to sound interpretation and it inevitably will lead to know-it-alls who actually know very little. Be patient, studious, and determined in your pursuit of Bible knowledge and understanding.