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1 Corinthians

But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. 1 Corinthians 2:15

Again as before, care must be exercised in considering this verse. It is not an absolute that everyone who has called on Christ has the ability to judge all things rightly. Not every "every" in the Bible is an absolute and not all "alls" in the Bible are either. They are often general statements which are applied to biblical truths. This is perfectly evident by reading commentaries on any given verse, including this one. The amount of disagreement on what is meant by Paul reflects the certainty that the Holy Spirit doesn't externally inject us with the knowledge necessary to make right spiritual judgments.

What the Holy Spirit does do is give us the ability, for the first time in our lives, to look into the wisdom of God from a spiritual perspective. What once was nonsense and foolishness now is understandable in a different way. We may not have, and no one certainly possesses, all the knowledge that is presented in the Bible, but we do have the spiritual ability to learn it in the way in which God intended. Unfortunately, there are many hindrances to right spiritual discernment. Some are:

- 1) Pride. We may have learned something in our biblical schooling and despite being presented with overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we remain close-minded to the truth lest we appear to look foolish.
- 2) Lack of proper study. The more one reads the Bible and studies it, the more it weaves into a unified whole in our minds. We begin to perceive macro

and micro structures which are contained throughout its pages. But this is hard, time-consuming, and often tiring work.

- 3) Personal bias. We may have a presupposition about a matter (dispensationalism vs. preterism, for example) and we may find it impossible to overcome the mental barrier because of how we perceive God's working in the world.
- 4) Source of authority bias. We may accept a source of authority concerning our understanding of the Bible which then affects our entire view of how to approach its truths. Roman Catholicism claims that the papacy is the authority on Bible interpretation. If we accept that, then we will follow in lock-step with whatever they say. This is true with others as well, including cults.

For these and other reasons, our ability to spiritually judge all things may be skewed from what God intends for us to see. Despite this, Paul continues with the thought that one who is able to view the Bible from its proper spiritual perspective, that person "is rightly judged by no one." The one who has accepted Christ and is viewing Scripture from that perspective is, at least in the overall sense, coming at it from the proper perspective. If a non-believer comes along and attempts to refute their interpretation of the Bible which is presented from this spiritual perspective, they will obviously be incorrect in their judgment of them.

How can someone who isn't in Christ judge someone who is in Christ concerning their knowledge of the source of their faith (meaning the words of the Bible given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) which they themselves don't accept? It would make no sense. It would be like an artist arguing with a mathematician about calculations in numbers because the numbers were the wrong color. It would make no sense because it is a category mistake. The color of a number (if written) is irrelevant to the content of the calculation because the substance of what numbers represent has nothing to do with color.

The same is true with the Bible. The substance of the Bible is spiritual in nature. To argue concerning the Bible apart from its spiritual message is a category mistake and therefore, the non-spiritual person cannot judge the spiritual interpretation of God's word.

Life application: Although there are differing views on the meaning and intent of scriptural verses and passages, ultimately, they must be viewed from the spiritual perspective intended by God. Only a person viewing them from such a perspective will be able to rightly deduce the true meaning of the passage. But competence, study, and prayer are needed. We cannot assume we have pure knowledge of Scripture without much effort and the accompaniment of the Spirit's illumination.

For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:16

In Isaiah 40, the Lord puts forth a series of rhetorical questions for us to consider. Paul uses the thought of Isaiah 40:13 to close out this chapter of 1 Corinthians -

"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,
Or *as* His counselor has taught Him?"

The answer is that no one can know the thoughts of the Lord unless He reveals them to us. As he said in verse 11, "Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." Because no one can know the things of God unless God reveals them to us, then without Him doing so, we are left with the most important questions of all unanswered and unknowable. Further, because He is God and thus the Source of all wisdom, no one can instruct Him. He alone is the bearer of all wisdom and knowledge. That wisdom and knowledge which we possess is only that which has been made available through His creation, of which we are a part.

Therefore, there is an infinite gap between the two unless the Spirit of God reveals His mind to us. And He has done so through the Person and testimony of Jesus Christ. The Lord (Jehovah) of the Old Testament is revealed in Him, so that by the Spirit of God "we have the mind of Christ." In other words, Paul is tying the Lord (Jehovah) directly to the Person of Jesus; they are One. Because the Spirit of God has spoken through the prophets and apostles, whose words are now provided in the Bible, and because we have received Christ and understand that the Bible is speaking of God's work in Him, the mystery is revealed. We have the mind of Christ.

The People's New Testament sums up Chapter 2 this way -

"Two things are learned from this chapter:

(1) There is a divine wisdom or philosophy.

(2) This divine wisdom, or mystery, is an absurdity or perplexity to the world, but the wisdom of God to the saints."

It should be repeated that though we have "the mind of Christ," this doesn't mean we automatically have all of it in its fullness. It means that it is available to us. It is up to each of us to study, contemplate, and meditate on the word of God. God's revelation to us isn't with a "spiritual hypodermic needle." It is the Bible. This is where our instruction is to be derived from.

One other point of note concerning chapter 2 is that Paul began it by highlighting his ministry as one which proclaimed Christ and Him crucified. It wasn't with elegant words to woo his audience, nor was it with persuasive words. It was in direct and simple language which accurately and responsibly handled God's word. Let each preacher of the Bible put away the frills and the fluff and focus on God's Word!

Would I describe a preacher,

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*I would express him simple, grave, sincere;
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,
And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture; much impress'd
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too; affectionate in look,
And tender in address, as well becomes
A messenger of grace to guilty men.*

William Cowper, The Task (1785)

Life application: To have the mind of Christ is to know Christ, but to have it in its fullness is to know the word which speaks of Him. Know your Bible.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:1

Paul is referring back to the words of the previous chapter, where he is comparing the natural to the spiritual. In verse 2:14, he said this -

"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."

It is important to understand that there is a difference between the word "natural" which is the Greek *psychikos*, and the word "carnal" in this verse. It is the Greek word *sarkinois*. The first word, natural, is not one applied to Christians - regardless of their spiritual maturity. It is a person who has never received Christ and is unregenerate.

Instead of this when speaking of the Corinthians, he uses a word which indicates a lack of spiritual maturity in Christ, but not a lack of spiritual nature. They have not developed in their walk and remain no more than spiritual babies. This state of immaturity is well-described by the author of Hebrews -

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Hebrews 5:12-14

And this is how Paul now speaks to those in Corinth. "And I" is Paul's introduction to the coming rebuke based on his previous words concerning spiritual matters. "Brethern" indicates that Paul is writing to the body of saved believers. This is a very important point to understand because by the time he gets to chapter 5, there will be a "brother" who is conducting his affairs in such an inappropriate manner that he will actually advise the body to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Paul's words in times like this, and in a host of other instances, indicate the eternity of salvation; one cannot lose what has been bestowed by the grace of God. But they can lose rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul is hoping to impart spiritual instruction to these immature believers so that they will grow, mature, and be found acceptable in their walk with Christ.

Though these are "brethren," he says to them that he "could not speak to [you] as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ." Though they are brethren, saved by the blood of Christ, he was unable to impart to them anything beyond the first milk of their spiritual meal. Unfortunately, this is a chronic condition in many. There is little desire to ever be weaned off the basics and to dig deeper into spiritual matters. What is all the more saddening is that in our

modern world, we have the Bible available at our fingertips at any given moment and yet we find it too much effort to pick it up, study it, and mature in our faith.

Life application: Spiritual maturity can only come through spiritual growth. Spiritual growth can only come through proper instruction in the tools available to the student. And the main tool that we have for spiritual growth and understanding is the Holy Bible. Logic, philosophy, etc are only effective for spiritual growth if they are combined with understanding the nature of God revealed in the Bible. Apart from this, they are ineffective for spiritual maturity. All things must be brought back to harmony with the word of God for spiritual growth to occur.

I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 1 Corinthians 3:2

In the preceding verse, Paul said to the Corinthians that he had to speak to them "as babes in Christ." This makes his comment in verse 2 understandable - "I fed you with milk and not solid food" is a metaphor for his speech to them. Because they were uneducated in the things of Christ, he spoke to them about the elementary tenets of the faith.

Babies don't come out of the womb and start chewing on steak. Instead, they require milk in order to develop. Eventually, through growth, they can start nibbling on pieces of bread or a bit of rice. As teeth develop, they can start to chew on tougher foods, like meat. This is also how we should develop spiritually, a little bit at a time. Unfortunately, those in Corinth stayed in a state of infancy and failed to move to adolescence and beyond. Paul tells them that they "were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able."

Again, the writer of Hebrews provides a parallel thought to this in Hebrews 6:1-3 -

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits."

Here, the author of Hebrews cites all of these as "elementary principles." They are things that even the novice in Christianity should be able to explain competently. Paul, writing to the Corinthians found that they were unable to handle even these basic principles and so he was obliged to continue to feed them milk, not meat. In chapter 14, he will relay to them their state of infancy when explaining to them about speaking in tongues. They were using tongues in church the way many churches still do today. There he says to them -

"Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature." 1 Corinthians 14:20

In the coming verse, Paul will give a list of other areas where the Corinthians were weak. By reviewing those things, we will see a congregation that still had one foot in the outside world. They were carnal and lacking Christian maturity. Two thousand years later, the faith is still full of such people - not because there are so many new believers, but because so many don't take time to faithfully read and study their Bibles. When they do, they continue to forget the context of the passage and only disorder results in their biblical understanding. Through Paul's hand, God is showing us how to keep this from occurring.

Life application: Go back up and read the list of "elementary principles" noted above by the author of Hebrews. Ask yourself if you can rightly explain each of them and why you believe them. If not, take extra time to learn them in a way that solidifies your understanding of them.

...for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? 1 Corinthians 3:3

This verse explains the comments of the preceding verse very clearly. Paul just stated, "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able." He notes that they "are still carnal" which indicates that though they are saved, they are immature believers who are living in the flesh more than under the influence of the Spirit. To explain what he means, he then provides three specific examples of their carnality:

- 1) There is envy. When someone possess something that another desires in an unhealthy way, it causes them to resent the one who possesses that thing - be it a physical attribute such as beauty, strength, hair color, etc., or be it a tangible possession, such as jewelry, clothing, etc. It can also involve positions of power, social standing, and so on. Whatever leads one to be envious of another is unhealthy and this will surely lead to strife. In the case of the church, envy can lead to a whole host of problems which includes both of the other two examples Paul mentions.
- 2) Strife. This involves in-fighting and contention. It is an outward demonstration of people unwilling to live in harmony with each other. Proverbs speaks about strife in great detail. One example is the cause of it -

"A perverse man sows strife,
And a whisperer separates the best of friends." Proverbs 16:28

Another proverb shows it's effect, but also provides a remedy -

"The beginning of strife *is like* releasing water;
Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts." Proverbs 17:14

Studying strife in the book of proverbs is a recommended tool for churches such as those at Corinth who are still living in a carnal manner.

- 3) Divisions. Paul spoke in chapter 1 about some of the divisions he was aware of at Corinth. Thus, his note to them about being carnal is supported by what he has already said. Divisions, if not resolved, will naturally lead to people quitting the church, completely separating the church into smaller bodies, or a host of other sad situations. It takes care, prayer, and wisdom to overcome them.

Because of these things occurring right there in the church, it demonstrated that they weren't living by the Spirit. And so Paul asks rhetorically, "are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?" The answer is "Yes." Instead of living in the Spirit and relying on the wisdom of God, they were living in the flesh and failing to pursue what was right and appropriate for holy living within the body.

Life application: Are you spending your time and energy within the church as a part of the problem or a part of the solution? Paul identifies those things which are disruptive and then he explains how to properly conduct oneself. Without reading and applying his epistles to our lives, we will inevitably find ourselves being a part of the problem.