

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part one - Teaching #2148

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WHY SPIRITUAL TRUTHS SEEM UNREAL TO THE NATURAL MIND

Before we get right into it I want to look at where that title phrase -

“renewed in the spirit of your mind - is found in the New Testament. I think you’ll see why I chose it and why it shapes so powerfully how the life of God gets inside our lives:

Ephesians 4:20-24 - “But that is not the way you learned Christ!— [21] assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, [22] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [23] and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, [24] and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

I know this isn’t the passage I’m dealing with at length tonight, but notice the way Paul sandwiches that key phrase - ***“renewed in the spirit of your mind”*** - right between ***“putting off”*** the old life, and ***“putting on”*** the new life of the Spirit. And Paul says the way ***both*** of these life changes take place is all involved in ***“being renewed in the spirit of your mind.”***

Obviously this matters a great deal. And that’s our study for many weeks.

1 Corinthians 2:11-14 - “For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. [12] Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. [13] And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. [14] The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

Let me start this series of messages by asking a question that seems simpler to answer at first hearing than it actually is - ***“What is the difference, right here and now, in this present life, between a saved person and an unsaved person?”***

“That’s easy, pastor Don. Saved people, those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, God the Son, are going to go to heaven. Unsaved people will suffer eternal torment in hell.”

While this is not often talked about anymore in the church, it is an absolutely Scriptural and correct statement. But it doesn’t really answer my question. I want to know what is the difference ***right now - in this present earthly life*** - between a saved person and an unsaved person.

“Well, saved people are morally pure and righteous while unsaved people are wicked and evil.”

Really? Is that always the case? Don't you know of at least one or two non-Christian people who are just as honest and disciplined and kind as you are? Are unsaved people **always** morally bad people? I mean, sure, some are **very** wicked. And none of them is absolutely **perfect**. But are not some of them at least as good as **you** and **I** are much of the time? I think we'd have to say, "Yes, they are."

So, just what **is** the difference between a saved person and an unsaved person, right now, in this present world? I don't think Christians think about this very much. And that has practical implications for us. Many Christians **themselves** don't know how to assess their current spiritual state. Some don't even know **what to look for in terms of their own assurance of standing in grace**.

I'm sure there are some people who are genuinely born again, who want to follow Jesus with all their heart, but they find themselves beaten into doubt by the Devil every time they fail God. Because they aren't yet perfect they assume they are not saved at all. Paul would offer encouragement in our text.

But much worse, on the other side of the coin, I believe there are many who **assume** they are saved because they go fairly regularly to church and have Christian parents or family members. Probably, in a church this size, there may be dozens of people who are **sure** they are saved, but aren't saved at all. And unless they look at questions like the one we're studying in this series, they will **never** come to see their true spiritual condition until it's too late. And we just can't let an issue of such importance go unexamined.

The Apostle Paul addresses the very question I asked in these tremendously important verses from First Corinthians chapter two. He's comparing the condition of the saved and the unsaved, right now, in this present world.

We're only going to introduce the topic this week. Don't form all your final conclusions quite yet. Above all, stay open to the Holy Spirit as He would encourage or convict. Don't just hear these sermons passively. As Paul says, examine yourselves as you hear the Word of God on this vitally important topic.

Let's begin with some of the big principles before we move on to some of the finer details:

- 1) **THERE IS A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE IN THE WAY IN WHICH DIVINELY REVEALED TRUTH IS *RECEIVED* IN SPIRITUAL PEOPLE AND NATURAL PEOPLE, AND MANY OF US SHOULD TAKE *COMFORT* IN THAT FACT**

The fact that there is a huge difference in response to spiritual truth is, it seems to me, unarguably obvious in our text. Whatever else Paul has in mind, he is dogmatic about this: ***people do not all receive spiritual truth when it's presented to their hearts:***

1 Corinthians 2:14 - "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

The "***natural person***" may or may not be a morally perverse person. But one thing is for certain, the ***natural*** person is not the same as the ***spiritual person***. That is, the natural person has not been regenerated by the Spirit of God. That is what Paul means when he uses the title "***spiritual person***." He doesn't mean some kind of charismatic mystic. He means any person in whom the Spirit of God has come with new life.

The natural person is on the outside looking in when it comes to receiving spiritual truth. Paul says he simply doesn't "**receive**" or "**accept**" the things of the Spirit of God. He may be absolutely brilliant in all other areas of life, but he won't accept the things of God.

Just consider that one point before we move on to other things. Paul says we shouldn't be shocked or surprised that many people - many intelligent people - don't receive the things of God the way we do. I wonder how many people actually become depressed, or worse, begin to question and doubt their own beliefs, simply because other people, whom they admire and respect in other areas of expertise, reject Christianity all together.

How do you react to the persistent unbelief of those around you? What about people hungering for hits on their web sites as they **de-construct** their once professed faith? Though writing about an entirely different subject, Paul does address this subject in **Romans 3:3** - "**What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?**"

Does the unbelief of others cause you to doubt God? Do you begin to wonder whether or not **your** faith might be misplaced? Paul has a word for you today. The natural person - those who live life apart from the influence of the inward regenerating work of the Holy Spirit - won't accept the things of God. The Bible says so.

They may **believe** in God. They may **believe** in the Trinity. They may **believe** that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They may even **believe** He died for our sins and rose from the dead. They may know **all** of these things but somehow **not apply these truths to themselves**. They won't **receive** the things of the Spirit of God.

So the first point of this teaching is that **we should expect this kind of difference in response to the things of God in this world**. Their stubborn and persistent rejection of the truth you love and embrace shouldn't cause you to despair and doubt the truth of the gospel yourself.

But there are still some very important questions raised here for thinking Christians. Exactly **in what way** does the natural person miss spiritual truth? Is it that he can't **understand it intellectually**? Is he not **smart enough** to grasp the truths you and I have embraced?

This is our next point of study:

2) WHAT IS THE *DIFFERENCE* IN THE WAY THE NATURAL PERSON AND THE SPIRITUAL PERSON RESPOND TO THE THINGS OF GOD?

- a) *Both the natural person and the spiritual person can have knowledge and understanding of the content of Biblical truth.*

I think it's very important to start here. All people, with or without the Spirit of God, can read the Bible. They can believe in God. They can know the doctrinal truths of creation and redemption. All persons can memorize Scripture, sing hymns and choruses, go to church and pray prayers.

There is no ***distinctive*** proof of spiritual life in these things alone. These abilities are common to all people and are not, ***by themselves***, any proof of a born again heart. One would only have to look to the example of the Pharisees in the New Testament. For all their religious knowledge, Jesus told them they were far from the kingdom of God.

That means when Paul says the natural person “**cannot understand**” the things of the Spirit of God (**14**), he doesn’t mean he can’t understand the words on the paper. Paul means something else **much deeper**, and we’ll look at that in a little while.

So obviously, the difference between the natural person and the spiritual person isn’t to be found in their knowledge of Scriptural facts or their observance of religious rituals and practices.

- b) ***Both the natural person and the spiritual person can believe the things they find in the Bible and in sermons are true.***

In other words, all thinking people can, of their own accord, come to the conclusion that the Bible is true in all that it says about the world, the future, God, and man.

This is another important point, because Paul **does** say the natural person “**doesn’t accept**” the things of the Spirit of God - **1 Corinthians 2:14a** - “**The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God....**”

We need to think about those words. Paul ***doesn't*** mean the natural person can't give mental assent to them. He doesn't ***accept*** these truths in terms of ***their implications for his own life***. He doesn't ***embrace*** these truths and allow his life to be ***affected*** by them. But that doesn't mean he can't agree with the ***content*** of the spiritual truths he hears and reads about in the Bible. Many times he does.

3) **THERE IS ONLY ONE SURE SIGN OF SPIRITUAL TRUTH RECEIVED BY A SPIRITUAL PERSON**

1 Corinthians 2:10-12 - "...these things [spiritual truths] **God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. [11] For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. [12] Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.**"

There is a sense in which **verse 11** is the key to understanding everything else Paul is saying in this challenging text - "**For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**"

This is why only those indwelt by the Holy Spirit can receive revealed truth in the sense of being deeply ***affected*** by spiritual truth. All people can ***read*** revealed truth in God's Word. All people can ***listen*** to spiritual truth in sermons and podcasts and on television. And all people can even ***agree*** with the truth they hear.

But there is a ***kind of sensing of spiritual truth*** that only the Spirit of God can bring. That's what verse 11 is all about. Paul uses the best illustration he can think of to make this complex truth clear and simple. The Spirit of God knows the mind of God the same way your spirit (small "s" - referring to your own ***inner self***) knows your mind internally - ***"For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God"(11).***

That's the comparison Paul is making. You know what you're ***thinking***. You, and only you, know what's in your ***memory***. I can't tell the kind of things you can or cannot recall. Unless you choose to reveal it, only you know what ***emotions*** you're experiencing. How many wives say to their husbands, "You never tell me how you're ***feeling!***"

The point is obvious. Even those who know us ***best*** can't usually tell what's going on inside us. Only my spirit knows the inner workings of my mind and heart.

The same is true of God, says Paul. ***Only God can convey a living, sensed perception of Himself.*** There is a knowledge of God that only the Spirit of God can generate. It's very hard to explain, but it is a knowledge of the things of God that goes beyond ***intellectual understanding.*** James says even the ***demons*** believe in one God (**James 2:19**). They know, but are totally void of spiritual life.

The best way I can say it is this: ***The Holy Spirit, when He lives and reigns in the human heart, causes the whole life to be affected by the things of God.*** He makes the things of God ***matter*** more than anything else matters.

It's very hard to explain this but the Bible gives us some pictures to help us grasp this truth. Here's how spiritual people ***hear God in God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 2:13*** - ***“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”***

That's it exactly! All sorts of people hear. And many even agree. But only the Holy Spirit can enable people to hear **God** in His Word.

These people are **affected** by the Word because they hear **God Himself talking to them in it** - **"....you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers"**

Seek God about this. Pray that His Word isn't just data in your brain. Pray that it **"is at work in you"** like your white blood cells aren't just **in** you, but fighting off **disease**. Spiritual people, says Paul, are **affected by what they hear in the same sermon that left someone else totally unmoved.**

Test your own heart with this truth. Anyone at all can **know** spiritual truth on a certain level. The Holy Spirit brings about the **experience** of the things of God. He excites the heart and mind around them. He affects the will with spiritual truth. He puts you **into** spiritual truth and life- **immerses** your loves and ambitions in it. It's almost like He **dyes** the entire fabric of your being in the color of His ways.

Think again about the powerful truth of **1 Corinthians 2:11** - **"For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."**

You know full well how your own mind can bring things to life inwardly that only you can know - **daydreaming** would be an excellent example. **Personal goals and passions** would be another. Your own spirit creates a **reality** within your being that can actually be **sensed and enjoyed**. This is what the Holy Spirit does in the spiritual man. Your life starts to **orbit** around the things of God. You develop a **sense** for spiritual realities - “O, taste and see that the Lord is good!”

Has that happened in your heart? Be absolutely honest - **Is it happening still?** Do you **glory** in the ways of God? Do you **taste** the sweetness of God’s ways so **obeying** Him, even when it’s costly, makes following your own small desires and plans seem ridiculous? Do you see and taste the beauty of God and His ways to the point where the **only** thing you know you **can’t** do is live apart from Him?

Don’t gloss over this. Don’t stage your own self-deception. Don’t live the Christian life just by the **here-say** of others. That’s like hearing about food and never eating. Imaginary Christianity is incredibly **boring**. Don’t rest content constantly dealing with the **outside** of spiritual life.

Jesus came to create the genuine thing. I want this church to be full of the real thing. All can come to experience this expanding realm of life and power through Him today: **John 7:37-38** - **“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. [38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ”**

That’s it exactly! That’s what the new birth - receiving Jesus - coming to Christ - whatever expression you choose to use - ***that’s what it’s all about.*** It’s not just ***knowing*** about Jesus. It’s not even just ***agreeing*** with what the Bible says about Him. It’s about ***soul transformation and satisfaction - like drinking cold water on a hot afternoon.*** It is having the thirst of your heart quenched and drenched in and through Him so you can’t possibly be satisfied ever again with the clawing, addictive emptiness of a merely ***materially oriented life.***

You will know when this happens. Don’t settle for anything less.