

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part three - Teaching #2152

Sunday, December 12th, 2021, 6:30 p.m.

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THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR SPIRITUAL THINKING

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.”

Romans 8:5-6 - “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. [6] To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Two Sundays ago we considered this important question - ***“What is the difference between the saved person and the unsaved person, right now, in this present world?”*** In other words, what is the difference, not in their ***eternal state*** but right now, in their present existence in this earthly life?

We found Paul's answer to this in our text from 1 Corinthians 2. The difference is the way the ***natural person*** (the unsaved) and the ***spiritual person*** (the regenerate) respond to spiritual truth. Both can ***understand the content of Biblical truth***. Both can even ***agree*** with the doctrines revealed. But, says Paul, the ***natural*** person doesn't "***accept***" the things of the Spirit of God (**1 Corinthians 2:14**). He doesn't ***embrace*** them. His heart is not ***excited and motivated towards*** them.

Perhaps the best way to say it is ***the natural person is not deeply effected by the things of the Spirit of God***. Talk to him about his investments and he's animated and involved. Talk to him about his recreation, or his hobbies and he's passionate and talkative. Talk to him about his earthly ambitions and he's committed and informed. He makes the effort and makes the time to flesh out his interests with knowledge and practice. He can't get enough of what he loves. His mind is naturally ***inclined*** towards those things. But the things of the spiritual realm aren't his deep concern. The tiniest bit of time and information is plenty. He's quickly bored.

Now Paul's whole point in these discussions is to point out and underscore the ***urgent need of the Holy Spirit to do His work in our lives.*** Only the Holy Spirit can ***convey the impact of spiritual truth in a way that will cause us to sense its importance and feel its transforming power.***

This whole issue ***defines*** what we should mean when we use the overworked term, ***“spiritual growth.”***

The phrase “spiritual growth” has become more sloganized than thought through. We all need to remind ourselves regularly that spiritual growth isn't merely a matter of not stealing and not getting drunk or not cheating on our wives. There are atheists who do none of those things.

No. We're talking about that ongoing, usually gradual process, by which the truths of God carry increasing ***weight*** in our lives. We never reach a contented level of dependancy on the Holy Spirit. We're to be constantly reaching greater saturation points of His impact on the way we receive and warm to spiritual truth.

Paul explains ***why*** this is so in **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 may not always analyze this whole process, but the fact is ***your thoughts create an inward life that drives the rest of all you do.*** You dream dreams. You plan plans. You can picture things with incredible vividness. Your thoughts ***create inward reality that is sensed by you and you alone.*** Only you know your thoughts. A thousand things happen every day that take no deep effect on your life, not because they aren't real, or didn't happen, but simply because ***you didn't think about them.*** ***You only mentally dwell on what matters to you.***

But there are other things that don't just ***happen*** to you like your lung's work in breathing or your digestive system. There are some things that you intentionally play on the screen of your mind. They become a part of you in some way. They ***motivate*** you and ***pull you in.***

Just as your mind relates this physical world to your inner life, so the Holy Spirit implants the things of God in a way that is ***living and inwardly sensed.*** And it's the nature of this inward work of the Holy Spirit that we are going to study in today's teaching. What is it that the Holy Spirit does to change our lives with spiritual truth? See to what extent this is happening in your heart today.

- 1) **THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS ABOUT A DIRECT UNDERSTANDING OF THE *INWARD* SPIRITUAL TRUTHS**

There are **external** spiritual truths and **internal** spiritual truths. The **natural** man can have the former, but only the **spiritual** man can have the latter.

External spiritual truths are truths like the doctrine of creation, the Old Testament history of God's work through His people Israel, the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, the history of the early church in the book of Acts. And so on. All men can have knowledge of these things. In fact, all men can **agree** that these things are true. You simply study and learn these truths.

Internal spiritual truths are truths about the beauty of holiness, the repulsiveness of sin, the all too easily overlooked danger of worldliness, the joy of communion with the Holy Spirit, finding contentment and peace through obedience to the law of God, and an excited anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus that results in a purified, cross bearing lifestyle in this world.

These aren't just truths you file in your head. These are truths that the Holy Spirit makes **happen** to you. These are truths that the natural person can only **hear** about. He only sees the **outside** of the Christian life. He can only know these things as **ideas**, never as **inward experience**. The natural person can only have the **knowledge of description** when it comes to these inward spiritual truths. The **inward understanding of the things of the Spirit of God** can only be communicated by the Holy Spirit Himself.

That this is what Paul means is obvious from the words of our text: **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."**

"Spiritually discerned." The NASB actually says, **"spiritually appraised."** That's a great phrase. Some things can be **mentally appraised** (or apprehended). You can simply **learn** about them. Study them, and there you are. But you can't make yourself **"appraise"** - or **value** - them properly. You won't leave your other treasures behind for them, even if you **agree** with them, because you don't attach proper **worth or priority** to them. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us **prize** spiritual things.

So, says Paul, the things of the Spirit of God can never be received as mere *ideas* - mere *mental data*. Paul says they must be "*spiritually appraised.*" By that Paul means only the Holy Spirit can apply the *inward truths of Christian experience* to the human heart. The spiritual person begins to see *glory* in them.

I know this isn't light, fluffy stuff. So let's try to shed more light on this same subject, only from a slightly different angle:

2) **THE HOLY SPIRIT CREATES AN AWARENESS OF TRUTHS THAT LIE, FOR NOW, BEYOND THE REALM OF THE PHYSICAL SENSES**

It seems to me that this is absolutely key to the kind of *spiritual understanding* Paul describes in our text. What marks the natural man's perception of reality is primarily that his thinking is anchored to *temporal concerns*. What he *senses* is real. What isn't seen or touched isn't.

But understand, it's not that all natural men **deny** that which lies beyond their immediate senses. Many will agree with everything the Bible says. Either their church or their upbringing has **taught** them to agree with the Bible. They feel they **should** acknowledge what the Bible says. But they aren't **impacted** by the world beyond their senses. In all practical effect, they **live** as though these things didn't exist, even though they may not **deny** them.

This is a most important point. The **natural person** (the unsaved), whatever he **professes** to believe, still makes this present world the object of his highest interest and affections. Whatever else he professes to believe, he **prioritizes his affections and actions** around the things of this world.

Now, remember the important question from our question - ***“What is the difference between the saved person and the unsaved person, right now, in this present world?”***

Here is a key part of the answer. When the Holy Spirit truly regenerates a person, that person has been, in the words of Paul, **“....transferred....to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”(Colossians 1:13)**. The Apostle Peter says the whole experience of conversion centers around an enormous change of perspective and focus in life:

1 Peter 1:6-9 - “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [8] Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, [9] obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

That’s it exactly! The Christian loves supremely something he hasn’t **seen** yet with his eyes. The Holy Spirit has already **transferred** the spiritual man’s affections toward glory. These are, in increasing measure (remember, it’s called **spiritual growth**) the most tantalizing things to his heart.

If that’s not happening, you’re not growing. The writer of Hebrews says this is what the life of faith is all about. **Faith lives presently in future certainties** - “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”(Hebrews 11:1). Then, to help make his idea more clear, he gives the great example of **spiritual far-sightedness** in Moses:

Hebrews 11:24-27 - “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. [27] By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.”

The point of all these references is to say this: ***the natural person may profess this kind of focus on unseen spiritual realities in life, but he never sustains it.*** Unseen spiritual realities may be ***acknowledged*** but they are never permanently ***impacting***.

The Holy Spirit changes this. In growing degrees he ushers in a new set of affections and convictions. That’s why Peter says those born again don’t just ***believe*** in Him who is unseen, they ***love*** Him who is unseen. And this produces the unspeakable joy of their earthly lives.

And the subject of joy leads right into the third point:

- 3) **THE HOLY SPIRIT OPENS THE HEART TO PERCEIVE THE BEAUTY AND PRECIOUSNESS OF SPIRITUAL TRUTHS**

Even if he mentally **agrees** with Biblical truths, the natural person only perceives them the way a blind person can learn about color. The blind person can know the names of all the colors on the spectrum. He can name them all and explain how the differing wave lengths of reflected light create each tone and shade. But all the information in the world is not the same as gazing at the gold of a sunset over the Pacific ocean.

The natural person can only learn of spiritual truth in a **detached** manner. He is not **moved** by its preciousness and beauty. The spiritual person, on the other hand, is **drawn into** spiritual things.

And that little phrase “**drawn into**” is actually a very accurate Biblical picture of the spiritual person’s response to the things of God. That’s why the Bible constantly pictures true spiritual perception, not in terms of a **lesson from a class room or lecture theater**, but in terms of being **driven by hunger or thirst: Psalm 42:1** - “....**As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.**”

Psalm 143:5-6 - “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. [6] I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land....”

This is powerful. How obsessed is a person dying of thirst in water. He's not doing a chemical analysis of water. He's not agreeing that water is wet or good for you. He's **craving** water. He's **driven** toward water. He's all about - nothing but - passionate about water.

Matthew 5:6 - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Here's the important point. Not one of these verses (and there are scores of others) is talking about merely **understanding** Biblical truth. Not one of them is even talking about **agreeing** with revealed truth in the Word. That's not the point of these verses at all. They're all about being **drawn into** the things of God. They're all about **deep longing** and **ultimate joy and satisfaction**.

That's the only proof of the Holy Spirit's work. He takes the **indifferent** heart and turns it into a **passionate** heart. Or, to put it in more Scriptural terms, He takes the heart of **stone** and turns it into a heart of **flesh** that is capable of **feeling and sensing** the things of God.

"More to be desired are they than gold" the Psalmist said of the things of God. Perhaps he puts his finger on the work of the Spirit in a nutshell. What excites you in this world? What drives you? Do you

desire God more than gold? There - **that's** the Holy Spirit doing something in your soul. Don't settle for less than this!

There's another sign of the Holy Spirit's work in the spiritual person. It follows logically from this last point of the Spirit's magnifying the joy and beauty of spiritual things:

4) **IN THE SPIRITUAL PERSON THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS AN AWAKENED *DISTASTE*, AN *ABHORRENCE*, OF ALL THAT IS IMPURE AND UNGODLY**

Somehow the Devil has successfully hidden a powerful and obvious truth from many of us in the church. I'm going to state it in just a minute, but I want to say first that there is no truth that is more logically obvious, yet more avoided than the point I'm going to make. In fact, it's **so** obvious that only the blinding work of the Devil can explain how a whole generation of Christians is growing up missing it.

Here's the point. If it is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause spiritual people to find beauty and joy in **holiness**, then it must be **also** the work of the Holy Spirit to cause spiritual people to see misery and ugliness in **unholiness**. This must follow logically. It cannot be otherwise.

Think of all the songs we sing on any given Sunday about the **beauty of holiness** and **how much we love God and holiness**. But we've got a whole generation, singing all these lovely songs, who don't shun unholiness. ***But you can't love genuinely something and love its opposite. You can't love holiness and also love what destroys holiness.*** It is simply impossible.

If I offer no resistance at all to an easy attachment to the unholy things of this world, then I can't honestly say I have a heart turned to the beauty and joy of holy things. Jesus said I cannot serve two masters. And this is what He was talking about.

Church, I'm not making this up. Let me put the very same idea in the words of the apostle John: **1 John 2:15** - ***“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”***

I can't love **exclusive** opposites. I can say I love chocolate **and** I love turnips. I can love them both because one does not **exclude** or **eliminate** the other. But I cannot say “I love the light **and** I love total darkness.” Or I love health and sickness. In what meaningful sense can I truly **love** the light if I love the darkness that eliminates it? In what meaningful sense is my **love** for light real if I love what destroys

it?

As the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, and as He awakens our taste for the beauty and joy in spiritual things, we will, in direct proportion to that inner transformation, come to hate and shun all that is **contrary** to holiness. The spiritual person Paul describes in our text becomes ***one whole person with one consistent, persistent passion.***

How many times, on any given Sunday, in prayer, word and song, do you tell the Lord you **love** Him? How do you know if that is true? There's only one way to know for sure. ***Do you hate all that is contrary to Him?***

When the Holy Spirit, through the Word, sermons, Christian friends, parents, or just your own prayerful meditation, tells you of something that is **contrary** to Father God's revealed will, what is your immediate response? Does your love for God compel you into forsaking that which is displeasing to Him? Or do you try to do the **impossible? Do you try to love two opposite things at the same time?**

We're right at the junction between this teaching and next Sunday's teaching. But I close with that question because the Bible presses the issue of spiritual life in the direction of a fork in the road. God seems unwilling to leave spiritual commitment half-baked.

We read the only two options at the beginning of this message - **Romans 8:6** - **“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”** This is not an impossible choice to make. You can make it. And you’re deeply involved in setting the direction.

Next week: ***“What it means to set your mind on the Spirit”***