

## **FIRST CORINTHIANS**

### **Understanding The Truth I Corinthians 2:14-16**

Have you ever been in a witnessing situation and said to yourself, "Why doesn't this person understand the truth? It is so obvious he needs Christ. Why doesn't he get it?" Or have you ever turned on your TV to a news broadcast and heard about murder, violence, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, adultery, premarital sex and a hundred other crimes or vices and out of frustration you said, "What's wrong with this world? Don't they see these things are destroying our society? Don't they understand the first thing about morality?" First Corinthians 2:14-16 tells us why the world does not understand and why we Christians get frustrated with the world and its wisdom. The wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world are on two different wavelengths, two different channels, two different foundations and the two shall never meet.

From 1:18-2:13 Paul has contrasted the false wisdom of the world with the true wisdom of God. The false wisdom is the human thinking of the world which is opposed in every detail to the Cross of Christ and spiritual realities as found in the Bible. True wisdom is the spiritual wisdom of the scripture. The true wisdom is referred to in this context as "the message of the cross" or "the power of God" or "the wisdom of God" or "God's secret wisdom" or "what God has prepared for those who love him" or "the deep things of God" or "the thoughts of God" or "what God has freely given us." This is a specific body of truth, God's wisdom, hidden to the world and available for every Christian but understandable only to those who are pressing on into spiritual maturity in the things of Christ. This wisdom of God is a mystery; it involves the deep things of God and it takes a mature Christian to understand and appreciate it.

#### **THE SOULISH, NATURAL MAN 2:14**

The man without the Spirit. This literally says, "The soulish man, and some translations say, "The natural man." It is the Greek word psychikos from which we get the English word "soul." A soulish man is a man as he is born, as he is by nature. Every person born into this world, without exception, is a soulish man or woman. A soulish man is a person dominated, influenced and energized by the soul which is the lower part of man's being. The soul has the power to choose, to will, to make decisions. The soul also has the power to feel, having the emotional capacity to have moods, urges and desires, and the capacity for emotion affects how one chooses. The natural philosophy is to say, "If it feels good, do it!" The person makes a choice on mood, desire, feeling or impulse so that his volition is controlled by emotions he feels within himself. The soul also has the power to reason so that conclusions are reached on the basis of pure logic and cold facts, and a man's rational power affects his ability to choose. The soul is that capacity which puts man on an animal level, a civilized brute, to choose, to think

and to feel. Therefore, a soulish man is dominated, influenced and energized by the human soul. He lives entirety on the materialistic level. There is no spiritual capacity in him. His horizons are bound by materialistic considerations and spiritual realities are beyond his horizons.

This kind of individual "lives as if there was nothing beyond the physical life and there were no needs other than material needs." Such a person "thinks that nothing is more important than the satisfaction of the sex urge" and thus "cannot understand the meaning of "chastity." One "who ranks the amassing of material things as the supreme end of life cannot understand generosity," and one "who has never a thought beyond this world cannot understand the things of God." (William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians).

The soulish man is one who has never risen above that which he naturally is. There is no evil connotation about being soulish, but it does imply the absence of spiritual discernment. The soulish man, therefore, is an unsaved man without the Holy Spirit. "These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural (soulish) instincts and do not have the Spirit" (Jude 19). The Bible says any person without the Holy Spirit is unsaved. "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Rom. 8:9b). The soulish man is an unregenerate, unsaved, unbeliever who is dominated by natural, worldly, sensual reasoning. His goals in life are centered on personal success, wealth, power, pleasure or anything else that builds his ego; People who live life like this are people of the world; This is natural and instinctive to them.

That is the physical (soulish) man. He may be outwardly a very good man, a very gracious man, a very courteous man, a very kind man, as long as he can have his own way. He lives for himself and finds a certain satisfaction even in doing good. He learns as he goes through life that honesty is the best policy, that he is happier if he is honest, and therefore many an unregenerate man is a model of integrity. He gets a degree of happiness out of meeting the needs of other people; he may be a very kind man, and there is a glow of warmth in his heart when he hands something to a needy person and that person responds, "God bless you, sir, you don't know how much good you are doing." There may be all that and yet no thought of living for God, no thought of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. Some natural men descend into things groveling and debasing, their appetites lead them into licentiousness and inebriety, but other natural men take what has been called the clean side of the broad way, the higher way of the natural man, but it still is the way that leads to destruction. As you walk down that road way you find all classes and conditions of people, some openly immoral, some vicious,

some abominably unclean, others eminently respectable, looked upon with admiration by their fellows; some of them very religious and finding a certain amount of satisfaction as they wind their way to the great cathedral or little chapel, as the case may be; as they sit in a Christian, Jewish or some other service, and as the meeting goes on they find satisfaction in feeling that they are doing the right thing. They are affected by the service; they love the music; if the preacher happens to be eloquent and appealing, they enjoy listening to him, and sometimes even though he is not eloquent, if he is earnest they like to listen to him (H.A. Ironside, First Corinthians).

Does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. The soulish, natural, unsaved man does not receive or welcome the things of the Spirit of God. What things? God's wisdom, the gospel, the body of spiritual truth as contained in the Word of God. He rejects and refuses the whole realm of the secret and hidden wisdom of God. His natural, soulish, animalistic, materialistic nature spurns the truth. The natural man may not even know of these truths about God and His plans and purposes of this world, and if he does know them, he could care less about God, supernaturalism and spiritual realities. Because the natural man wants nothing to do with God, he misunderstands much about life since the universe centers around God not man. What's the point? The unsaved, soulish person DOES NOT and CANNOT accept, receive or welcome divine truth!

For they are foolishness to him. The unsaved person sees spiritual things as distasteful, insipid, absurd, stupid and moronic. Why? Because the natural is all he understands. He cannot rise above his humanistic thinking. For him, it is nonsense to value spiritual things above material things. He is unable to understand the gospel and he is unable to think like a Christian thinks, and he never will until God supernaturally works in his life to bring him into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The subjects of sin, judgment, hell, forgiveness, eternal life, heaven and all spiritual truths are repugnant to the unsaved man and always will be until he bows his stubborn will and receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

And he cannot understand them. Notice the word "cannot." The unsaved man has absolutely no capacity for spiritual truth. It is impossible for him in his natural, soulish state to know God's wisdom. Unless God does something to a soulish man to help him understand divine truth, he will forever stay lost and condemned. Yes, this is a humanly impossible situation, but nothing is impossible with God.

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you. When He comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned” (Jn. 16:7-11).

Because they are spiritually discerned. God’s wisdom can only be discerned, appraised, judged, scrutinized, examined and evaluated by those who are spiritually awakened. Those who do not have the Holy Spirit cannot examine and discern spiritual truth. The unsaved man does not have the Holy Spirit; therefore he has no capacity for spiritual truth. The soulish man is like a deaf person judging music - he has no capacity to do so. The word “discerned” is a legal term used by a lawyer in a preliminary trial before going to the Grand Jury. The thought is that even a preliminary investigation of scripture by the unsaved man demands a work of the Holy Spirit. The saved man sees the same things in the Bible that the unsaved man sees, but the unsaved man does not understand them. He may be able to rejoice a little in the Bible before he is saved, but only because he is in the period prior to his salvation when the Holy Spirit is convicting and teaching him. For this reason, it is difficult to expect one to believe who is exposed to the gospel for the first time. It is like gestation. No child is born without a pregnancy. So also in spiritual things there is a period of preparatory grace or setting apart before the new birth actually takes place.

The soulish, natural, unsaved man cannot grasp the gospel or appreciate spiritual truth. He cannot view marriage or sex or divorce or abortion or euthanasia or homosexuality or murder or crime as does the Christian because he does not have the Holy Spirit enabling him to understand God’s body of truth, divine revelation, the Bible. It is logical and reasonable for the unsaved man to involve himself in premarital sex if it is pleasurable and does not hurt anyone. It is logical and reasonable for an unsaved person to commit adultery if a marriage is not working out. It is logical and reasonable for the soulish man to abandon his marriage through divorce if it doesn’t go his way. It is logical and reasonable for the natural man to accept homosexuality as a legitimate alternative lifestyle, it is logical and reasonable to put older people to death when they are no longer able to function in society. It is logical and reasonable to abort a fetus because no one really knows when life begins and a woman has the total right over her own body. It is this kind of natural reasoning which produces a Nazi philosophy of racism which commits six million Jews to the gas chamber or enslaves millions of people because they are black in skin color. Why these atrocities? They come because the unsaved man has no capacity to understand the secret and hidden wisdom of God. Just because the world does not understand these things does not affect the Christians responsibility to teach the truth about these subjects and to legislate this truth if possible because God’s moral law and wisdom are unchangeable.

There are electrical waves passing through this room. You cannot see, hear or feel them, but they are there. Bring a TV, plug it in, and these waves are made real by a picture and by sound. With a converter, these electrical waves are discerned. So it is with the unsaved man. There is a real spiritual world all about him, but he does not know it exists. He needs a converter and that converter is the Holy Spirit. When he gets the proper equipment, he will pick up the vibrations of the real spiritual world.

## THE SPIRITUAL MAN 2:15-16

The spiritual man. Now Paul contrasts the soulish, natural man with the spiritual man. The Greek word is pneumatikos which means "dominated by the spirit." Just as a natural man is one dominated by his human soul, so the spiritual man is one who is dominated by his human spirit. The soul is the lower part of man which makes him an animal. The spirit is the highest part of man which makes him able to commune with God. A spiritual person is one whose spirit has become predominant over his soul. This happens because the Holy Spirit comes into a person and activates his dead human spirit. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16). Therefore, in the broadest sense "spiritual man" refers to all Christians because all Christians have the Holy Spirit residing in them. However, the world has a narrower application to those whose human spirits have so developed and matured that they dominate their souls with all their soulish inclinations. A spiritual person, then, is one dominated by the spirit and not the soul, and this can only come through a deep relationship with the Holy Spirit. The spiritual man is one who is open to the Holy Spirit, who yields to the Holy Spirit, who obeys the Holy Spirit, who is led by the Holy Spirit. The idea behind the concept of a spiritual man is that of a mature Christian. A spiritual person is not just one who has the Holy Spirit living inside of him (all Christians have the Holy Spirit, but many are babies in Christ). Nor is the spiritual person one who is devoted to Christ (there are many babies in Christ who have devotion to Him, but they are not spiritually mature). Nor is a spiritual person one who has fiery zeal for Christ (there are many babies in Christ who have much zeal for Him). Nor is a spiritual person one who radiates a positive Christian testimony of good works (there are babies in Christ who do this). Nor is a spiritual person one who is filled with the Holy Spirit (babies in Christ can be filled with the Holy Spirit). What then is a spiritual man or woman? He or she is a spiritually mature Christian who has walked in dependence upon the Holy Spirit for a long period of time, so much so that the human soul's inclinations are dominated by his human spirit's communion with the Holy Spirit

Makes judgments about all things. The spiritual man judges, appraises, examines, discerns, evaluates, scrutinizes all things. What are the "all things?" They are "what God has prepared for those who love him (I Cor. 2:9); they are "the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10); they are "what God has freely given us" (I Cor. 2:10); they are "the things that come from the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2:14). The "all things," therefore, refer to the body of Christian truth called the gospel revealed by God and put down in the Bible. Only the Christian can discern and evaluate the Bible correctly because he has the Holy Spirit.

Because the Christian has the Bible as his absolute rule for life, he is able to make moral and ethical judgments in any area of life about anything. This does not mean a Christian knows everything, for obviously Christians do not understand everything about mathematics, the physical and social sciences, the arts or whatever. What this means is that everything has a moral and ethical dimension to it. Everything can be rightly or wrongly used, and it is the duty of the Christian to point out to himself and to the world what is the right way and wrong way to use things. Because the Christian has the Bible as his absolute standard for life, he can pronounce final judgment in areas such as marriage, sex, abortion, divorce, euthanasia, homosexuality or whatever moral or ethical issues confront society.

Any Christian potentially has the ability to make judgments on all things because he has the Holy Spirit, but in actuality only the mature not babies can accurately make these judgments. Just because one is a Christian does not automatically make him a judge of morals and ethics. There are millions of Christians who are not practically equipped to make such judgments. Why? These can only be made by those who are "spiritual"; that is, those who are mature. The mature are those who know their Bibles; those who understand the secret and hidden wisdom; those who walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit. These are the ones who can make accurate moral and ethical judgments. It is the mature, with Bible in hand, who can speak out against materialism, greed, manipulation of people for evil ends, social oppression and racial bigotry. All this is done when judgments are made from the Bible, God's wisdom, and not from man's feelings, opinions or preferences.

"The Spiritual man is the man who has thoroughly studied the mind of the Spirit as he has spoken the Old and New Testaments. He is, furthermore, willing to be taught by the Spirit. He prays, he searches diligently and waits before God for an understanding, an illumination of his mind by it; he tries to understand the problem before him, and only then makes a pronouncement that could be called the judgment of the Lord" (Ray Stedman, I Corinthian Notes).

But he himself is not subject to any man's judgment. The spiritual man does judge all things, but he himself cannot be understood by anyone who is not spiritually mature, whether that person be unsaved or a baby in Christ. Quite often a spiritual man (or woman) will be misunderstood and come in for a great deal of unjust criticism because he seeks to please only Christ by applying God's wisdom and he does not worry what baby Christians or the unsaved will think. A spiritual man may on occasion have to go against the law of the land if that law is oppressive or anti-Christian. In this case, he clearly sees that God's law, God's wisdom, is above and beyond the man-made laws. Out of conscience, he must obey God rather than man. Who can make these kinds of decisions? Not babies in Christ, but mature, spiritual men and women who know the Bible and have a sound walk with the Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 2:15 has been one of the most abused verses in all the Bible. When Paul says, "The spiritual man makes judgments about all things but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment," he is not referring to some kind of spiritual elitism which makes one Christian superior to another Christian. This in no way supports "the deeper life" or "the victorious life" or the "second blessing" teachings which pave the way for people to think they have come into deeper, mysterious, esoteric truths about God than the average, unspiritual and second class Christian. There are many in our day who claim some spectacular spiritual gift like tongues, prophecy or miracles, or claim special revelations from God which they think makes them just a notch or two superior to ordinary Christians. They claim to have reached a higher level of spirituality, and they point to this verse which says, "The spiritual man is not subject to any man's judgment." Because they think they have reached some higher plain of spirituality and maturity, then no human being less spiritual has the right to judge them.

What Paul is claiming is the spiritual man has the ability to judge all things as they relate to the Cross. The Cross, the true wisdom of God, gives the spiritual man the ability to judge all human wisdom in light of divine truth. A baby Christian has the Holy Spirit; therefore, potentially has the ability to judge all things. However, it is the maturing, growing Christian empowered by the Holy Spirit who actually and progressively makes these judgments.

"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" This is a loose quote from Isaiah 40:3 to simply show that all true wisdom is hidden in Christ because he is our wisdom (I Cor. 1:30).

But we have the mind of Christ. The "we" may refer to all spiritually mature Christians but it probably refers to the Apostles who were spiritually mature, and they put down their thoughts in the inspired Bible for us. Now we have God's wisdom, the Bible, which is the mind of Christ. For us today to have the mind of Christ is to be operating on the deep things of God. It is to be evaluating all things with moral and ethical connotations as they relate to the Cross. We have the mind of Christ and we are to act with the mind of Christ. As spiritually mature Christians, we will be able to discern the changing standards of our day and direct men back to Christ and the mind of Christ, the Bible. Those who have and know and appreciate the mind of Christ are to live out the mind of Christ in a practical way. Those who live out the mind of Christ in this world will face social and physical persecution by worldly people, but it is only those who live out the mind of Christ in a practical way who will make a radical impact upon this world for Christ.

"Being spiritual does not lead to elitism; it leads to a deeper understanding of God's profound mystery redemption through a crucified Messiah" (Gordon Fee, I Corinthians).

## CONCLUSION

What does God want Christians to learn from this passage? First, the natural, soulless, unsaved man cannot come to Christ until the Holy Spirit does a sovereign work in his heart. Until that time, the unsaved man will always look at salvation and the Christian world view as nonsense, absurdity and foolishness. Second, God expects every Christian to grow into spiritual maturity, and it is the spiritually mature who can make correct value judgments on moral and ethical issues. Third, spiritual maturity comes through knowledge of the Word of God, use or practice of the Word of God whereby the person is discerning good and evil and extended time.

"In fact, for the time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Christian maturity does not come primarily through group singing, prayer meetings, sharing times or church activity (although these things are necessary for worship and service), but maturity comes through a knowledge and use of the Word of God over a long period of time which brings spiritual discernment in moral and spiritual issues. It takes time to become a mature Christian; and no one can become mature spiritually until he or she has gone through the school of hard knocks. Fourth, the spiritually mature Christian will always be misunderstood by the unsaved and will quite often be misunderstood by the babies in Christ. The spiritually mature person is a puzzling person to many because he understands God's wisdom and displays the mind of Christ in his approach to life.

If you are a non-Christian your attitude towards Christ and Christianity is either indifference or rebellion. The whole concept of God, supernaturalism, salvation through Christ, Christ's death and resurrection, heaven, hell and faith are all a mystery and puzzle you. Why? You have not been convicted by the Holy Spirit. You have not been drawn by the Holy Spirit. You have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. There is a whole spiritual world out there but you cannot understand it. The key to life is found in this spiritual world. How can you get into this spiritual world? Not by good works, not by education, not by philosophy, not by religion, not by water baptism or by church membership, but only by the Holy Spirit who will so work on you and in you that you will desire to bow to Christ and receive him as your Lord and Savior. When you respond to Christ in humble, simple faith, then you will know the Holy Spirit has done a supernatural work in you. Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe" (Jn. 6:63).