

PREFACE

Several weeks ago I pointed out that to fully grasp the teaching of this latter part of Chapter Two, we need to understand how Paul employs the word *pneumatikos*, translated “spiritual.” So far we have been nibbling around the edges of this, but in this session, and to the end of the chapter, we hit it head-on. In our culture this word is used and applied in quite broad terms; not just grammatically but in application and perception it is decidedly a small “s” spiritual. In this culture one is “spiritual” if one thinks high thoughts, if one contemplates deep things, if one prays to or worships any god of one’s choosing; if one meditates on just about anything.

This is not how Paul uses *pneumatikos*. Though the word is not capitalized in our Bibles because of the grammar rule, the apostle *means* it in a capitalized way. When Paul writes in v15 that “he who is spiritual appraises all things,” he is referring to the person who considers himself to be a person of *the* Spirit, a person in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells. Paul *always* uses *pneumatikos* as “an adjective having to do with the person or ministry of the Holy Spirit” (Fee).

There will come a day when our entire being—body, spirit, soul, mind—will be completely and eternally supernatural. That day will come at the bodily resurrection of the dead, so energetically related in the climax of this letter in Chapter Fifteen. Paul pulls out all stops, and one can hear the cathedral walls vibrating as the pipe organ rumbles accompaniment to these dramatic words.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-55.

As we detailed last week, right now for every Christian, regenerated but still dwelling in fallen flesh, we are *spiritually* made supernatural by the joining of our spirit with the Holy Spirit of God—both spirits given us by Him. And this supernatural condition is what sets believers apart from the “natural man” (v14)—those *not* spiritual.

There is one more point to establish before we examine our passage. That is, we need to understand—or remind ourselves—what Paul meant in vv6-7, when he opened this argument.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-7.

So that we can accurately interpret what Paul refers to when he uses such words as “wisdom” and “mystery,” we need to realize that when Paul speaks (v6, v13) of what is revealed to believers about God, because of the Holy Spirit (who “searches all things, even the depths of God”) he is not likening God’s wisdom to the cultic “mysteries” of the Hellenist society—those deep, dark secrets so mysterious that one must be painfully initiated into their knowledge. Paul is simply, once again, referring to the gospel: “Christ crucified.” *That* is the mystery.

We should not imagine that Paul refers to delicious, fantastical secrets of God reserved for those who are in Christ. The “wisdom...not of this age” (v6), the “hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages” (v7), all discerned by spiritual means, refers to God’s plan of salvation for man in Christ. That is sufficiently fantastical in itself.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:12-13.

v12

Now we...

We should not journey beyond the second word of our text without stopping to clarify, as best we can, the pronoun “we.” There are generally two schools of thought on who Paul includes in the pronouns “we” and “us” in these two verses. Both can be substantiated by the context (vv6-16).

The Apostolic Position

Respected interpreters such as John MacArthur, Adam Clarke, W. C Kaiser and Matthew Henry take the position that with “we” Paul means “we apostles.”

- v6: **we do speak** wisdom
- v7: **we speak** God’s wisdom in a mystery
- v10: to us God revealed them through the Spirit
- v13: [things freely given to us by God (v12b)] **which things we also speak**

W. C. Kaiser writes, “Paul is not talking about the Spirit that animates believers, but about the Holy Spirit’s operation in delivering the Scripture to the apostle.” This position essentially keeps the entire passage from v6 to v16 focused tightly on the apostles’ ministry, from “we do *speak* wisdom...” (v6) through “which things we also speak...” (v13). (By the way, Kaiser’s book, *The Messiah in the Old Testament was one of my principle references for our study Christ in the Old Testament.*)

The “all believers” Position

On the other side are equally respected interpreters such as Gordon Fee and David Garland and many others, who take the position that the “we” refers to *all* believers.

- v7: predestined before the ages **to our glory**
- v9: all that God has prepared **for those who love Him**
- v10: to us God revealed them through the Spirit
- v12: **we have received...the Spirit** who is from God

It is certainly true that all Christians have the Holy Spirit, and that He is instrumental in our “know[ing] the things freely given to us by God” (v12). Beyond that, however, Gordon Fee adds to that “our glory” (v7) and “those who love Him” (v9), pointing out that Paul’s language “seems to make the most sense as referring especially to the Corinthians”—that is, Christians in general.

Once again we can safely conclude that both positions *can* be true; one cannot be labeled a heretic for subscribing to either. My position (for whatever *that* is worth), is that for the *entire passage*, Paul *primarily* has in mind the work of the Holy Spirit in implementing God’s wisdom through the apostles, but within that focus he also, for a few verses, includes a discussion of the Spirit’s work in *every* believer.

Now we have received...the Spirit who is from God,

A. T. Robertson informs us that the tense of the verb translated “received” (*elabomen*), means that this refers to a “definite event.” We can receive things accidentally, we can take or even seize things for ourselves (which the root, *lambano*, can also mean), but this refers to a specific, eventful reception of something given us by God: the Holy Spirit.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world,

Paul is not suggesting there is a supernatural spirit, a distinct entity, that is a counterpart to God's Holy Spirit, nor is he referring to demonic spirits. He is saying that the spirit we *did* receive from Him is not of this world. Paul repeatedly uses every tool at his disposal to convince the Corinthians that they now "belong to a different world order, a different age" (Fee), and thus should be rejecting, rather than embracing, the world order of *this* age.

This may be one of the most difficult lessons for believers to accept and put into practice. It can seem almost impossible to live and work and eat and breathe in this world, yet to think and live as if we are *not* of this world. Some are better at this than others.

This is one aspect of what is meant by "walking by the Spirit." Galatians Chapter Five is our textbook for this; here the apostle paints a picture for us contrasting living by the flesh and living by the Spirit of God.

Read Galatians 5:16-18, 24-25.

Walking by the Spirit requires diligence, practice, determination; it does not come naturally to us. But our gracious God gives us a head start and advantage by implanting His Holy Spirit within each one of us as a guide and helper.

so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

Just as in v5—where he gave us the "why" for what he says in vv1-4—Paul now, at the end of v12, gives us the why for what he says in vv10-12a. And again, this does not refer to mystical, secret revelations known only to a few, but refers to God's salvation plan for man. There is a clue for this behind the word translated "things freely given."

things freely given = *charizomai* = middle from <G5485> (charis); to grant as a favor, i.e. gratuitously, in kindness, pardon or rescue :- deliver, (frankly) forgive, (freely) give, grant.

Paul uses the same imagery and words—but more explicitly referring to salvation in Christ—in Romans.

Read Romans 6:22-23.

freed from sin = *eleutheroō*

free gift = *charisma* (this *charisma* is "eternal life in Christ Jesus")

v13

Read v13.

which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit

And now he swerves back into explicitly mentioning his apostolic work in their midst. Which things? Eternal salvation through the crucified Messiah: "Christ crucified." The first portion of this verse is a restating—thus, reemphasizing—of what Paul said in vv4-5.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

But here he also segues out of what he has been saying about *all* believers. *Just as you all have received the Spirit so you can understand the gift of salvation in Christ, we too bring a message in words taught by the Spirit.*

The first part of this verse is straightforward, and since it reiterates a previous truth, it is quickly apprehended. Unfortunately, not so the remainder of the verse.

combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Aside: One of the burdens of in-depth Scripture study is that from time to time the student comes across passages such as the one before us here—one in which there is no definitive correct translation. And it prompts a rather obvious question: If God through the Holy Spirit bothered to leave us His authoritative word in the first place, couldn't He have insured that every passage was crystal clear to all? Whatever His reasoning, God did not do this.

Although there does seem to be a narrow consensus among scholars favoring the NASB, a comparison of our popular translations alone reveals the differences of interpretation.

NASB: combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

NIV: expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

ESV: interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

KJVs: comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

I will not inflict on you the grammatical minutia behind the reasons for these discrepancies—the opaque verb tenses, the mysterious gender of *pneumatikos* (the word translated “spiritual”) and implied, rather than specified, objects—but let A. T. Robertson summarize his conclusion.

Robertson: If *pneumatikois* be taken as neuter plural, the idea most naturally would be, “combining spiritual ideas (*pneumatika*) with spiritual words” (*pneumatikois*). This again makes good sense in harmony with the first part of [the verse]. On the whole this is the most natural way to take it, though various other possibilities exist.

Thus we could paraphrase v13, *We apostles speak to you the things freely given to us by God—not using words of human wisdom, but words taught us by the Holy Spirit of God—the result of combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.*

Here is one more definition of walking and living by the Spirit. We get our truth from one source: from Father God via His Spirit. Everything we live by—even down to our very thoughts—is informed and energized by the Spirit of God.

And *this* is what makes us supernatural, *spiritual* beings.