

*1 Corinthians 2:14-16*

## CLARIFICATION

Based on a few remarks made in class last week, I believe it would be helpful to clarify what I meant when I spoke about God's grace in placing us where he did so that I might best serve Him according to His will. When I spoke about the contrast between our lifestyle and the typical "nine-to-five job, coming home to mow the lawn," I was not referring to conditions at that work place, nor was I even referring to the time element (although that *would* be a factor) but was primarily referring to the "head-space" element. For me, personally, living and working out in the world, day after day—even just living in a typical neighborhood—I would be incapable of shifting my head space into where it would need to be to fulfill my calling by the Lord—as a writer, teacher, and illustrator of Scripture through drama. Since He knew this, the Lord found us a home more conducive to that necessary "head space."

## PREFACE

For most of my life my vision had been 20/20, so, naturally, when the text written across the TV screen became illegible to me—I blamed the TV. Only later, when street signs began behaving the same way, did it occur to me that perhaps my eyesight was the culprit. I was then introduced to my first pair of glasses—bifocals, no less. And then that myopic gibberish suddenly became legible.

This is precisely the point Paul has been making since v6—and especially from v10, regarding the work of the Spirit of God. Those without the Holy Spirit—referred to as a "natural man" in v14—cannot comprehend what is before them because they lack the corrective lenses of God's "spectacles"—the Holy Spirit.

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.**

Verse 13 can be considered parenthetical, as there is a natural flow from v12 to v14:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the **things** freely given to us by God

(which **things** we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.)

But a natural man does not accept the **things** of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

## v14

*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God,*

I appreciate the simple but faithful definition of "natural man" supplied by the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: "Man as he is by nature, contrasted with man as he becomes by grace." That is the succinct version, and it is smack on, but we might also profit from the slightly more verbose version supplied by M. R. Vincent—which bears an eerie similarity to my TV experience.

But *psychikos*, natural, is not equivalent to *sarkikos*, fleshy. Paul is speaking of natural as contrasted with spiritual cognition applied to spiritual truth, and therefore of the soul, as the organ of human cognition, contrasted with the spirit, as the organ of spiritual cognition. The man, therefore, whose cognition of truth depends solely upon his natural insight is *psychikos*, natural, as contrasted with the spiritual man (*pneumatikos*) to whom divine insight is imparted. **In other words, the organ employed in the apprehension of spiritual truth characterizes the man.** Paul therefore “characterizes the man who is not yet capable of understanding divine wisdom as *psychikos*, natural, i.e., as one who possesses in his soul, simply the organ of purely human cognition, but has not yet the organ of religious cognition in the *pneuma*, spirit” (Dickson). (emphasis added)

As David Garland wryly adds, “Only one with spiritual perception can examine beyond the visible evidence and attest that the ‘foolishness of God’ plus the ‘weakness of God’ equals the ‘power of God’.”

**man** = *anthropos* = man-faced, human being (male or female); hence ESV “person.”

Note the word “accept” (KJVs: *receive/eth*). This is not saying that he does not understand (although that is also true), but that he does not admit the things of the Spirit of God into his heart. (Vincent)

for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

The point all of this is that the natural person *cannot* “accept the things of the Spirit of God” because he hasn’t the necessary organ to comprehend it—just as the lettering on the TV was gibberish to me until I put on a pair of spectacles. Every individual believer *can* accept the things of God because we have the Spirit as a specific promise from Christ Himself.

### Read John 14:16-17.

And here we are back to the concept of “like is known by like.” The nonspiritual person is not “like” God because he hasn’t the Spirit of God to make him like God, who is spirit-kind. The spiritual person, who *has* the Spirit within, is now, as it were, of the same species as God; being spirit-kind, he not only understands but can accept, apprehend and embrace the things of God.

### v15

*But he who is spiritual appraises all things,*

In contrast to the natural man (*psychikos anthropos*), the one who is spiritual (*pneumatikos*) is able to appraise all things—a word which v14 ends and v15 begins and ends: *anakrino*.

It is necessary for us to spend just a few moments with this word—especially because of the versions other than the NASB that translate this “judges/judged.” There is a sense in which those translations are not incorrect, if one interprets judging as investigating, discerning. But the word does not mean to hand down a verdict, as a judge would in a court of law. That’s not the idea.

**appraised/appraises**<sup>nasb</sup>, **discerned/makes judgments (judges)**<sup>niv,esv, kjvs</sup> =  
*anakrino* = from <G303> (ana) and <G2919> (krino); **properly to scrutinize, i.e. (by implication) investigate**, interrogate, **determine** :- ask, **question**, discern, **examine**, judge, search.

A short verse in Chapter Nine, in which Paul uses the same word, illustrates this in all but the NIV.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 9:3. (Not NIV)**

The venerable Bishop Lightfoot wrote, "*Anakrino* is neither to judge nor to discern; but to examine, investigate, inquire into, question, as it is rightly translated in 1 Corinthians 9:3."

Spiritual people can appraise the things of God because God is spirit, and His ways are spiritual. But I have purposely used the words "can," and "is able to." We are graciously given the spectacles that reveal spiritual truth, but, sadly, not all avail themselves of their use.

*David Guzik:* The natural man is unsaved. Too many Christians still *think* like natural men, refusing to spiritually discern things. When our only concern is for "what works" or the "bottom line," we are not spiritually discerning, and we are thinking like the natural man, even though we might be saved. (emphasis added)

As we will see when we turn the page to Chapter Three, this was the problem in Corinth. The members of this congregation were believers; they each had the Spirit within them, but they were still living as *psychikos anthropos*—natural men. God supplies the spectacles, but He does not force us to put them on.

*yet he himself is appraised by no one.*

We must keep this within its context. Paul is not saying that the spiritual person is above examination or discipline by others who are spiritual—

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)**

—but that those who remain natural, without the Spirit, have not the capacity or standing to examine those *with* the Spirit.

*Albert Barnes:* That is, his feelings, principles, views, hopes, fears, joys, cannot be fully understood and appreciated by any natural or sensual man. He does not comprehend the principles which actuate him; he does not enter into his joys; he does not sympathize with him in his feelings.

*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?*

As he has before, Paul backs up his point by lifting some text from the Old Testament—in this case Isaiah 40:13 from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT).

Original	LXX	1 Corinthians 2:16a
Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him?	Who has known the mind of the Lord? and who has been his counsellor, to instruct him?	For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?

(All are questions that expect the answer, “No one.”)

To be in possession of the Holy Spirit of God—that is, for our spirit to be connected to His Spirit—is to know the “mind” of God. In the context of Chapter Two, spirit and mind are virtually synonymous, for “mind” here refers not to some mystical permission to roam about in every nook and cranny of the Sovereign’s brain, but to understand God’s *mindset*, the way He thinks.

*But we have the mind of Christ.*

And just as Spirit and mind are synonymous in this context, so are the Lord—i.e., Yahweh—and Christ, or at least Christ as a channel of understanding the mind of God.

Even here we have not left the context of the gospel, the cross of Christ and God’s plan of salvation for man through Christ crucified. Thus Paul does not describe (as perhaps the Corinthians had hoped) a mystical possession of Christ’s brain or, as above, the ability to know every thought in our Lord’s brain—the privilege and ability to read His mind. Instead it means that spiritual people are those who share in the cross of Christ, and everything that entails. It means “to have a cruciform mind” (A. R. Brown). Paul illumines this further in his second letter to the Corinthians.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.**

To “have the mind of Christ” means to think like Him. And how does He think?

### **Read Philipians 2:3-8.**

*Sigurd Grindheim:* To be spiritual...is to have apprehended the word of the cross in such a way that it has transformed the entire existence of the believer into its image—to a cruciform life, a life characterized by self-sacrificing love, and where power is manifest through weakness.

To be spiritual, instead of just natural, is to perceive and receive all of life here on earth during this age—*everything*—through the prescription of God’s spectacles by means of the Holy Spirit, who “searches...even the depths of God.”