
THE NATURAL & SPIRITUAL MAN

George Battey | 4/1/14

QUESTIONS:

- 1) When Paul wrote about a "*natural man*" what did he mean?
- 2) What comes out at night?
- 3) What does the word "*revelation*" mean?
- 4) What is a "*revelation*" which no one can understand?
- 5) Who knows what God is thinking?
- 6) When Paul wrote, "We have received the things of the Spirit," who did he mean by "we"?
- 7) When you buy a translation of the Bible, what sort of translation should you buy?
- 8) After Joseph explained the dreams of the Baker and Butler, did they understand the dreams?

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 2:14-15

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

On the surface this passage seems to be saying the sinner is unable to understand and appreciate spiritual matters.

Here are some samples of comments which men have made regarding this passage:

"Can we not with our mere natural reason understand and explain the Scriptures unto the knowledge of salvation?"

No; because our reason has been corrupted by sin. 1 Cor 2:14."

(Edmund Belfour, Explanation of Martin Luther's Small Catechism, p. 6)

"What must we do to use God's Word rightly?"

We must first pray to God for the enlightenment of His Spirit, and then read the Word devoutly, with an honest purpose to live according to it. 1 Cor 2:14."

(H. U. Sverdrup, Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, p. 23)

"The apostle is contrasting the "spiritual" and "natural man," that is, the regenerate and unregenerate, and this is what he tells us of the unregenerate. ... "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." He rejects them. All the motives by which their acceptance may be urged, are entirely without avail. And why? Because "they are foolishness unto him" – he has no proper conception of them. "Neither can he know them." He can have no proper understanding of their value, excellence, or necessity, "because they are spiritually discerned." In order to see them aright, and appreciate them, he must be made a "spiritual man." His understanding must be enlightened, and his affections changed. How any one can take a plain common sense view of this passage of Scripture alone, in its obvious sense, and yet contend for the doctrine of full ability, I am at a loss to see.

(William D. Smith, What is Calvinism?, pp. 116-117)

These comments are typical. People in general read this passage and conclude:

- The "natural man" is the unconverted sinner.
- The "spiritual man" is the converted Christian who has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, the Holy Spirit must come down and work a miracle upon the heart; He must "*enlighten*" our minds in order for us to understand the things written in the Bible.

Now, if this passage is teaching sinners cannot understand the Scriptures until the Spirit "*enlightens*" them, then:

- Gospel preaching becomes almost worthless, because the sinner cannot understand the Bible until the Holy Spirit comes and works a miracle upon his mind.
- The sinner becomes irresponsible. It won't do any good for this sinner to read the Bible, or try to obey anything, because he couldn't understand anything anyway!

If anyone is lost it would sort of be God's fault for withholding the "enlightenment" wouldn't it?

WHY HAVE THE BIBLE?

Q: If this passage is teaching we must be "*enlightened*" by the Spirit, then what use is the Bible?

ILL: In college a girl I didn't like, liked me. Suppose I decided to write letter to discourage her:

Dear Bertha,

I feel it's only fair to write and explain my true feelings I have toward you. Your hair is like silk to me. Your teeth are like the stars in the heavens. Your ears are like beautiful flowers. I hope you understand what I mean.

Sincerely, George.

This would only fuel the fire! I would have to go along to explain everything:

- hair like silk = corn silk
- teeth like stars = they come out at night
- ears like flowers = cauliflowers

The letter was worthless because it failed to impart knowledge; it failed to communicate accurately.

Might as well dispense with the letter and communicate directly.

If we must become inspired to understand the Scriptures, why not dispense with the Scriptures altogether and let everyone be guided by direct revelation?

NOTE: A "*revelation*" which cannot be understood is no revelation at all!

MEANING OF "REVELATION"

"revelation" – to reveal, to unveil, to uncover

The Bible is suppose to be the "*uncovering*" of God's will, but if no one can understand it, it is no revelation at all.

If the Holy Spirit must "*enlighten*" your thinking for you to understand God's will, why not dispense with the Bible completely and have the Spirit reveal God's will directly without any written words?

PROBLEM PASSAGES

If indeed the Holy Spirit must enlighten our understanding before we can understand what is written, there are certain passages which become very difficult to understand.

For example:

Psalms 19:7-8

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, **converting the soul**;

The testimony of the LORD is sure, **making wise the simple**;

⁸ The statutes of the LORD are right, **rejoicing the heart**;

The commandment of the LORD is pure, **enlightening the eyes**;

"The law is perfect converting the soul" – How can this be if no one can understand a word of it?

"The law makes the simple wise" – This ought to say the Holy Spirit "*enlightens*" the minds of simple and thereby makes them wise.

"The commandment enlightens the eyes" – Calvinism says the only way one can be enlightened is by a direct operation of the Spirit.

Again:

Romans 1:16

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

"The gospel is God's power unto salvation" – The theory of "*enlightenment*" however says the gospel is powerless without the Spirit performing a miracle upon a sinner's understanding.

Other passages could be given, but this should suffice to show that some are looking at this passage in 1 Cor. 2 in the wrong way.

CONTEXT (1)

Let's begin our study of 1 Cor. 2:14 by looking at the context in which it falls.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

The preaching of the cross seemed foolish to men who were trying to find God by their own wisdom.

These men were trying to learn of God and of God's will **by natural means**.

The idea that a man dying on a cross saved people from sins was a foolish idea to the world who is relying on it's own wisdom.

But for men who would believe and accept this gospel message, it was the power of God to save them.

CONTEXT (2)

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

⁴ And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

⁵ that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

In contrast to men who were using their natural means and natural wisdom to discover God and His will, Paul came preaching the gospel.

- The gospel was revealed miraculously and directly to Paul.
- After the gospel was revealed to him, he then preached it to the people.
- He demonstrated the message he preached was from God by the miracles he performed.

In this way the faith of these people would not rest on the natural wisdom of men, but rather upon the power of God.

CONTEXT (3)

1 Corinthians 2:6-8

⁶ However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

God had a plan of saving the world before He even created the world, but this plan of saving man was a secret.

- God did not fully reveal it to man during the OT days.
- It was a "mystery" – a secret – as to how God was going to save mankind.

If men could have figured out this plan by their own natural means *"they would not have crucified the Lord of glory!"*

But because men were relying upon their own natural means and because they were rejecting God's revelation, they ended up crucifying the Lord Himself.

CONTEXT (4)

1 Corinthians 2:9

⁹ But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Not talking about heaven here.

Man with his natural abilities could never have figured out the plan God had devised to save the human race!

It never entered the mind of anyone that God would save mankind by sacrificing His own Son!

CONTEXT (5)

1 Corinthians 2:10

¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

This plan God devised was finally revealed though!

"God revealed them unto us by his Spirit" – Who is "us"? Paul is speaking of the apostles.

Ephesians 3:5

⁵ [The mystery of how God would save man] in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to **His holy apostles and prophets**:

God's secret is not a secret anymore. His mystery is not a mystery anymore, because He has now revealed it thru His apostles.

- Things the "eye hath not seen" = now has been seen.
- Things the "ear hath not heard" = now has been heard.
- Things that "hath not entered the heart" = now has entered.

God did not reveal this secret to just any one. He revealed it directly to His apostles and prophets. After He revealed this secret to these men He instructed them to write the revelation down and to preach it so uninspired men could now know this secret.

Ephesians 3:3-4

³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,
⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

CONTEXT (6)

1 Corinthians 2:11

¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

QUESTION #1: If you have a secret, who is the only one that knows the secret?

Only your own spirit knows that secret and if anyone else ever finds out about it your spirit will have to reveal that information.

QUESTION #2: If God has a secret about how to save mankind, who is the only one that knows the secret?

Only God's Spirit and if anyone else ever finds out about it His Spirit will have to reveal that information to them.

And ... He did reveal it! He revealed it to special men called apostles and prophets!

THE CONTEXT (7)

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

"We have received the Spirit" – the apostles!

These were the men God chose to reveal His secret to.

John 14:26

²⁶ "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach **you** all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Jesus is here promising the Spirit only to the apostles in order that God could reveal His secret plan to them.

"We speak not in the words of man's wisdom" – not only did God reveal His secret to the apostles, He even gave them the exact wording they should use in writing it down and in preaching it so there would be no mistakes.

NOTE: This is why we need a "formal" (word for word) translation of the scriptures. The word of God is inspired in both "thought" and "word."

The NIV claims to be a "dynamic equivalent" (thought for thought) translation. But we need more than just the "thought" translated. We need the words given to express those thoughts! The apostles need the exact words and we do too.

CONTEXT (8)

1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

"the natural man" – the uninspired man who is depending upon his natural abilities could never have figured out the secret plan of God.

Q: Why couldn't a man with his natural abilities have figured out this secret plan of God?

Paul gives two reasons:

- **God's plan is foolishness to man's way of thinking.**
- **God's plan is "spiritually discerned."**

Q: What does this mean?

1) God's plan is foolishness to the way men think.

Isalah 55:8-9

⁸ "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.

⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Things that are wise to God are foolish to man's way of thinking and vice versa.

Because man thinks so differently than God he could never have figured out God's plan by his own natural abilities.

2) God's plan is "spiritually discerned".

God's secrets (plan) are learned only when the Spirit reveals them to inspired prophets.

SUMMARY

In summary, the "*natural man*" in verse 14 is not an unconverted man.

"natural man" – the **uninspired man** who has nothing to work with but his own natural abilities.

Everyone of us in this assembly is a "*natural man*." None of us are inspired apostles or prophets.

Without inspired apostles and prophets we have no clue of how to serve God or how to be saved!

NOTE: This does not mean we cannot understand what the apostles and prophets wrote! Once God reveals His secrets to a prophet and that prophet writes it down, we can all understand the will of God.

THE BAKER & BUTLER

To help illustrate what I'm saying I want to review a story from the OT.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, found himself in the Egyptian dungeon with the baker and butler of Pharaoh.

Genesis 40:5-8

⁵ Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation.

⁶ And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.

⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

⁸ And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please."

Q: Why couldn't these men understand what their dream meant???

They couldn't understand because they were "*natural men*" – uninspired men. They had nothing to work with but their own natural abilities.

But Joseph could understand because he was a "*spiritual man*" – an inspired man.

Genesis 40:9-23

⁹ Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine was before me,

¹⁰ "and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes.

¹¹ "Then Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

¹² And Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days.

¹³ "Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler.

¹⁴ "But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house.

¹⁵ "For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also was in my dream, and there were three white baskets on my head.

¹⁷ "In the uppermost basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

¹⁸ So Joseph answered and said, "This is the interpretation of it: The three baskets are three days.

¹⁹ "Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you."

²⁰ Now it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

²¹ Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

²³ Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

After Joseph gave the interpretation everyone understood plainly what God intended to do.

NOTE: The inability of the baker and butler to understand the dream had nothing to do with their spiritual condition.

- If you, or I were there we would not have understood any better than they did.
- These men did not understand the dream initially because they were uninspired with only their natural abilities to aid them.
- **However** when an inspired man revealed what the dream meant, everyone understood as plain as day what God's will was!

PHARAOH'S DREAM

This same phenomenon is observed over and over again in the Bible.

We come next to Genesis 41 and the dream of Pharaoh:

Genesis 41:1-8

¹ Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river.

² Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow.

³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river.

⁴ And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke.

⁵ He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good.

⁶ Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them.

⁷ And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, it was a dream.

⁸ Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.

Not one wise man in Egypt could figure out this dream because they were all "*men*." By their own natural abilities they had no clue what was going on.

Genesis 41:9-13

⁹ Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: "I remember my faults this day.

¹⁰ "When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker,

¹¹ "we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream.

¹² "Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream.

¹³ "And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."

There's still a few of these butlers around aren't there? They forget a friend until they need a friend!

Genesis 41:14-16

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh.

¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it."

¹⁶ So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

The reason Joseph can understand the dream is not because he is more saintly. He wouldn't have done any better than any other man in Egypt if he were not inspired!

Genesis 41:25-32

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do:

²⁶ "The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one.

²⁷ "And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine.

²⁸ "This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do.

²⁹ "Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt;

³⁰ "but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land.

³¹ "So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe.

³² "And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Do you see the point?

NOTE: The inability of Pharaoh and the Egyptians to understand the dream had nothing to do with their spiritual condition.

- If you, or I were there we would not have understood any better than they did.
- These men did not understand the dream initially because they were uninspired with only their natural abilities to aid them.
- **However** when an inspired man revealed what the dream meant, everyone understood as plain as day what God's will was!

(Cf. Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2); Belshazzar's dream (Dan 5))

CONCLUSION

Now ... in conclusion, what are we trying to say? We're trying to demonstrate:

1) God's will is revealed only to inspired apostles and prophets!

Men today claim, "*God gives me dreams and visions and He speaks to me.*"

Well ... I doubt it, **but if he did**, you wouldn't be able to understand it anyway because you're not an apostle, or an inspired prophet!

God reveals His will only thru inspired apostles and prophets.

2) After His will is revealed, He provides the exact words for those men to write it down so everyone else can benefit from it!

3) After God's will is revealed and written down by these inspired men, everyone who wants to can read it and UNDERSTAND God's will.

People today whine: "*I just can't understand the Bible. I just don't know what God wants me to do.*"

Well ... you're just not trying very hard then! He has revealed His will in such a way that whoever desires can understand and obey!

John 8:32

³² "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

1 Timothy 2:4

⁴ [God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

If anyone is not saved it will not be because it was impossible to understand the will of God. It will be because:

- They didn't take the time and effort to learn His will, and
- They didn't go to the effort to obey it when they did learn it!