

September 20th, 2020

# The Free Will of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

## Love yourself?

The biggest enemy that you and I face is that we have a disordered love of ourselves. Clearly, the Bible assumes that we will have a love for ourselves, it's something that God built into us. Jesus uses our *love of self* to teach us how to love our neighbor: "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*" (**Mark 12:31**). Paul uses our *love of self* to teach husbands how to love their wives: "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife *loves himself*. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church" (**Ephesians 5:28-29**).

## A disordered love of self

The problem is *not* a proper self love, rather it is a disordered self-love. What is a disordered self-love? Self-righteousness, pride, looking down your nose at others, because you believe in some way you are better than they. This begins at our earliest age. On the playground a boy puffs himself up over the next boy because he can play football better. Or a girl looks down her nose at another girl because she is more pretty and popular. This is the disease of every human being. It was the disease of the disciples. How many times did Jesus rebuke them for arguing over which one of them was the greatest in the kingdom of God? That is what was going on in Corinth, they are dividing up into factions, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos" (v.12). This was akin to the cliques that form in high school—the jocks, the preps, the stoners, the brains, the goths, the loners—each group looking down on the next. Fleshly, worldly, carnal thinking. Dear congregation, that is what is going on in this Church. How do I know that? Is it because as a pastor I know many of your particular

issues? No, I know that this is your problem, because this is my problem, this is the universal problem of humanity.

### **The free-will of the Holy Spirit**

How does God cure us of this problem? By reminding us of how we came to Christ in the first place. It is not our free-will that brought us to Christ, it was the free-will of the Holy Spirit. How you think about your salvation feeds or kills self-righteousness.

### *The Big Idea...*

It is only because of the free-will of the Holy Spirit that you have come to know Jesus Christ, therefore self-righteousness has no place in your life

- ☆ The Freedom of the Holy Spirit (v.10-13)
- ☆ The Bondage of the Natural Man (v.14)
- ☆ The Mind of the Spiritual Man (v.15-16)

## I. The Freedom of the Holy Spirit

### **Four truths about the Spirit**

The main subject in this section that Paul is drawing our attention to is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned six times in five verses. So let's consider four truths about the Holy Spirit. **1)** The Person of the Spirit; **2)** The Privilege of the Spirit; **3)** The Property of the Spirit; and **4)** The Power of the Spirit.

## Truth #1: The Person of the Spirit

Paul is continuing his argument from last week. He told us in **v.9** that the way that the world learns—through our seeing, our hearing, our thinking—that way of learning can never succeed in discovering the gospel. He doesn't *merely* mean that the world could never discover the gospel through seeing, hearing and thinking; but also that the world would never accept the truth of the gospel. The Pharisees heard the gospel with their ears, but refused to believe it in their hearts. So in **v.9** Paul says that the whole world is in a pitch black room, and not only do they not know where the door is, but they don't have the key. Here in **v.10**, he shows us how "...believers are [rescued] from this darkness."<sup>1</sup> **v.10** "These things God has revealed to us *through the Spirit*." Stop. In other words, Paul is saying 'At your salvation, you didn't encounter God, He encountered you.' Recall what Jesus said in **Matthew 11:27** "...no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and *anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*." And the way that Christ reveals the Father to us is through the Holy Spirit. What's so special about the Holy Spirit? End of **v.10** "For [*or because*] the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." The Spirit *searches*—this doesn't mean He is searching in order to learn, it means that He is always fathoming and beholding the excellencies of the Godhead. And this brings us our first truth: the Holy Spirit has Personality and is Himself Divine.<sup>2</sup> He has a **personality** *because* He has an intelligence that is actively beholding and examining and mulling over the glories of the Godhead. And He is **Divine** because this verse tells us that He searches *everything*—meaning He know all things—He is omniscient. But only God can know everything.<sup>3</sup> That's

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 110

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 34

<sup>3</sup> "It is impossible for a lesser creature to understand a more advanced one. How can anything understand something more complex and advanced than itself? For a flea to understand a dog it would have to be at least as advanced as a dog. For a dog to understand a man it would have to be at least as advanced as a man. How much greater distance is there between Creator and creature? John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 60

**truth #1:** the reason why the Holy Spirit can reveal God to us is because He is the Divine third person of the Trinity.

### **Truth #2: The Privilege of the Holy Spirit**

Please look at **v.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.” This is an analogy. My thoughts are the most hidden things about me. Only I know them. Only I can disclose these to you. It is impossible learn what I’m thinking unless I tell you. In like manner—so goes the analogy—no one can know God unless the Holy Spirit tells you. It’s like what Abraham told the rich man when he asked if Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool his tongue, “between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit alone is in this privileged position to be able to cross that great chasm from God to you. When Peter made his great confession to Christ in **Matthew 16:16** “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Did Jesus compliment him for his ingenuity and intelligence?<sup>5</sup> No quite the contrary. He said “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, *but my Father who is in heaven.*” ‘Peter you had nothing to do with it. My Father, through the Holy Spirit, planted that truth in your mind, caused it to grow in your heart, and bear fruit through your lips.’ As Jesus says in **John 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” That’s **truth #2:** It is the privilege of the Holy Spirit *alone* to reveal God to us. No one but He can cross the great chasm that separates us from God.

### **Truth #3: The Property of the Spirit**

Please look at **v.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

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 16:26

<sup>5</sup> Insight from Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 131

by God.” Notice the either/or that Paul sets up: “...either you have a spirit that is oriented toward human pride and wisdom...independent of God, *or* you have God’s Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> Everybody in the world falls into one of these two categories. Either your wisdom is *merely* human based—the spirit of the world; or your wisdom comes from the Spirit of God. What would be an example wisdom from the spirit of this world? Worldly thinking is anything that offers a different answer to the chief end of man. What is the chief end of man? ‘To get wealthy, make a name for myself, indulge in pleasure, avoid pain.’<sup>7</sup> Worldly thinking is anything that offers a different Savior. ‘As long as my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, I will go to Heaven and avoid Hell.’ Christians no longer think like that, because we have received “...the Spirit who is of God.” We have *received* Him—received *Him*. Meaning He now dwells in us. What a wonder!<sup>8</sup> And this Spirit dwells in every believer. Think of the apostle Paul. One minute he is ravaging the Church, dragging off Christian men and women to prison.<sup>9</sup> The next minute he is on the ground, blinded by light from Heaven, and he is addressing Jesus Christ as Lord.<sup>10</sup> What happened? New management took over. The Holy Spirit took up residence in Paul, and kicked out the spirit of the world that was in him. Paul looked the same, he had the same personality, the same intellect, he lost none of his prior learning or reasoning skills. But now he was indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. And as such, as the rest of v.12 says he was able to “...*understand* the things<sup>11</sup> freely given us by God.” Everything

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, pg. 132

<sup>7</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 15:32

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit is not just the instrument through which God delivers truth, He is the native home of truth Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 65

<sup>9</sup> Acts 8:3

<sup>10</sup> Acts 9:5

<sup>11</sup> “The things that he makes mention of as *given by Christ* are the blessings that we obtain through his death and resurrection—that being reconciled to God, and having obtained remission of sins, we know that we have been adopted to the hope of eternal life, and that, being sanctified by the Spirit of regeneration, we are made new creatures that we may live to God.” Calvin, pg. 113

changed. Now his new chief end was to glorify God and to enjoy His Christ forever. Now his savior was no longer a righteousness of his own that came from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.<sup>12</sup> What happened? He became the property of the Holy Spirit whom he received. That's **truth #3**: Christians freely receive the things of God, *because* the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence in them.

#### **Truth #4: The Power of the Spirit**

Please look at v.13 “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom *but taught by the Spirit...*” Stop. Here the “we” in the sentence shifts from all Christians *in general* to the apostles and by extension pastors. “We impart” that is, “we preach and teach” —not by the power of human ingenuity, but by the power of the Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Now this is remarkable. Paul is saying that not only does his authority as an Apostle come from the Holy Spirit, but his very ability to preach comes from the same Spirit. He is returning to the truth he laid down in v.4 “...my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” All true preaching is a supernatural act of the Spirit. That's why we often read in the book of Acts that before one of the Apostles opened their mouth, the Scripture says, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said...”<sup>14</sup> or “Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit said.”<sup>15</sup> This being *filled with the power of the Spirit* comes with a definite effect. The second half of the verse shows us the effect of Spirit-filled preaching. Paul says “...interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” This describes what happens between the preacher and the listeners: the Spirit unlocks these truths in the act of preaching, so that God's people can understand them.

There are many examples but let me just give you one. When Peter

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<sup>12</sup> Philippians 3:9

<sup>13</sup> “...*words taught by human wisdom*, refers not so much to the style of delivery, the emphasis of 1:17-18 and 2:4, but to the source of the content of the message.” Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 133

<sup>14</sup> Acts 4:8

<sup>15</sup> Acts 13:9

preached to Cornelius and his household in **Acts 10:42-43** telling them of "...the One who was appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." What happened? **v.44** says "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word." They all believed. The Spirit unlocked the truths that Peter was preaching, and the Spirit caused those who listened to understand. That's **truth #4**: All true preaching is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and all true understanding of that preaching comes from the same Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

### Why is Paul stressing this?

Now why is Paul stressing these things? Because of our compulsion to pride, to ego, to congratulate ourselves, to lift ourselves above our brethren. It may seem like a strange medicine—like how invisible radiation can help treat cancer. A child may ask: "how can that tumor be killed with something that that you can't see, or taste, or touch?" Medicine is often a strange thing. Timothy had some stomach issues, and Paul prescribe that he drink a little wine (**1 Timothy 5:23**). Not quite sure of the connection there, maybe some of you who are more medically inclined know. Likewise, we might not immediately see the connection here between Paul teaching us about the Holy Spirit and how that is the medicine to self-righteousness. So let's try to make it clear. How can you have any self-righteousness if it wasn't your *thinking* that caused you to believe the gospel? Paul said in **v.11** "no one comprehends the thoughts of God." You didn't *think* your way into believing. What can you be proud of? How can have any self-righteousness if your free-will wasn't the deciding factor in your conversion? It was the free-will of the Holy Spirit. **v.12** "...we have received... the Spirit who is from God, *that we might* understand the things freely given to us by God." In other words, prior to the Spirit coming to you, you didn't understand *anything* about God. You understand *because the Spirit was given to you first*. The Spirit was not given to you *because you first understood*. The Scripture

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<sup>16</sup> Human words have only human effects

never compliments the Christian when he/she comes to Christ—the Scripture always compliments God.

**Matthew 16:17** “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, *but my Father who is in heaven.*”

**Ephesians 2:8** “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, *and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*”

**John 6:45** “*And they will all be taught by God.*’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”

Dear congregation, do you see *why* looking at the way in which God has saved us is immensely practical? These things are meant to humble us to the dust. The bigger God is in our sight, the smaller we are—and the less prone we will be to self-righteousness. That’s our **first point**. It was the sovereign freedom of the Holy Spirit that saved us, we contributed nothing.<sup>17</sup>

## II. The Bondage of the Natural Man

### The animal man?

Paul now strengthens his argument by looking at the natural man in v.14. This verse is such a devastating verse to human pride that many have tried to explain it away by changing the identity of this natural man.<sup>18</sup> The Greek word *can* refer to the sensuous nature, a life governed by the five sense. This phrase *can be* rendered “the animal man” as opposed to “the natural man.”<sup>19</sup> So the idea

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<sup>17</sup> The death blow to self-righteousness is in seeing that you had nothing to do with your salvation, in fact you fought against it.

<sup>18</sup> For a fuller development of the argument, see Hodge, pg. 42-43

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, pg. 115

is that Paul is contrasting the sensual man (v.14) to the intellectual man (v.15). In other words, it is the sensual man who doesn't accept the things of the spirit but the intellectual man does. But this will not work because it contradicts everything Paul has already written. He told the Corinthians in 1:26 "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were *wise*" meaning 'not many of you were intellectual.' Paul's entire argument has been to demonstrate that it is not through the intellect that people come to believe the gospel. No. Paul is not contrasting the sensual man with the intellectual man. He is contrasting the unrenewed man, or the unsaved man, with the Christian.

### **The natural man: unwilling and unable**

So let's take a look. v.14 says "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." To paraphrase this verse, we could say: 'the non-Christian cannot believe the gospel because it is stupid to him AND because he is not able to believe it because it can only be understood with the Spirit.' Notice there are two parts to this verse: 1) The natural man is *unwilling* to believe, and 2) The natural man is *unable* to believe.

#### **1. The natural man is *unwilling* to believe**

v.14 says "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, *for* they are folly to him." Why isn't the non-Christian willing to believe? Because these things are *folly*. The word means dull, insipid, tasteless, foolish, stupid.<sup>20</sup> Nobody believes stupid things, precisely because they are stupid. But why does the non-Christian think the gospel—the things of God—are stupid things? This is one of the devastating effects of the fall.<sup>21</sup> Before the fall, man was in friendship with God. But after the fall, man has become God's enemy. And now fallen man cannot stand God or His word. Jesus told those who

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<sup>20</sup> Hodge, pg. 43

<sup>21</sup> Augustine said, before the Fall we were. "Passe Picare" - able to sin. After the Fall we are "Non Passe Non Picare" - not able to not sin.

wouldn't receive His word "Why do you not understand what I say? *It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.*" (**John 8:43**). Or consider **John 3:19-20** "...light has come into the world, and *people loved the darkness rather than the light* because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things *hates the light...*" The natural man hears what Jesus Christ has done and it is laughable nonsense to him. When Paul was under Roman custody before he was shipped to Rome, he had the opportunity to preach to Governor Festus. There was great pomp in the audience hall that day, and all the prominent men of the city were there. When Paul arrived at the climax of his message, proclaiming that Christ was sent to suffer for our sins, but God raised Him from the dead, Festus said with a loud voice in the hearing of them all "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." (**Acts 26:24**). No doubt a roar of laughter broke out. Paul's words were utterly ridiculous Festus. That is how the natural man, the unrenewed man reacts to the gospel. That's why the Holy Spirit must renew our heart first. **Ezekiel 36:26** "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Apart from that happening the unrenewed man will never be willing to believe the gospel. That brings us to the second part of our verse.

## 2. The natural man is *unable* to believe

Look at the end of v.14 "...and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." It is not simply that the unsaved person does not believe, or that he will not believe, it's that he *cannot* believe.<sup>22</sup> He is *not able* v.14 says. **Romans 8:7** says "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, *it cannot.*" Or **John 6:44** "*No one can*

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<sup>22</sup> Hodge, pg. 43

*come to me* unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Why is sinful man unable to come to believe on his own?<sup>23</sup> Let me just give two reasons.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.1 The natural man is blind to spiritual things.

First, the natural man is unable to believe, because he is blind to spiritual things. **2 Corinthians 4:4** says “In their case the god of this world has *blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing* the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” When unbelievers are told about the gospel of Christ, it is nonsense to them—it’s like trying to teach a blind man what color is, or a deaf man music. That’s why Jesus said in **John 3:3** “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again *he cannot see* the kingdom of God.” Sinners can’t see, because sin is darkness. **Proverbs 4:19** says “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.” Don’t you see? That is why Jesus’ said He came into the world. **John 9:39** “I came into this world, that those who do not see may see.” When He restored the sight of Bartimaeus in Mark 10, or the man born blind in John 9, He wasn’t merely giving them physical sight. It was a sign of what salvation accomplishes, namely, restoring spiritual sight. That’s why salvation is described as the Holy Spirit restoring our sight sight. **2 Corinthians 4:6** “God...has shone in our hearts to give the light of the

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<sup>23</sup> Larger Catechism Q. 25. Wherein consisteth the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell? A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called original sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions.

<sup>24</sup> A third reason that the natural man is unable to come to Christ is because he is a slave to sin. The natural man is unable to come to Christ, because he is a slave to sin. **John 8:34** says “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” Or **Proverbs 5:22** “The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.” The children of Israel could not free themselves from their slavery in Egypt, only God could break their chains. That’s why salvation is described as God freeing us from slavery. **John 8:36** “...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (cf. **2 Tim. 2:25**). Unless the Holy Spirit frees the natural man from his slavery to sin, he cannot come to Christ.

knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”<sup>25</sup> Unless the Holy Spirit restores the natural man’s spiritual sight, he will never find his way to Christ.

## 2.2 The natural man is dead in his sins

Thirdly, the natural man is unable to come to Christ, because he is dead in his sins. God was not speaking in metaphorical language to Adam in the garden when He told him “...in the day that you eat of *it* [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] *you shall surely die*” (**Genesis 2:17**). Adam did die that day. He died spiritually. The natural man is spiritually dead. **Ephesians 2:1** “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.” That’s why salvation is described as being raised from the dead. **Ephesians 2:4-5** “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*” Pastor Arlan and I were talking last Lord’s Day and he brought a great illustration of this to mind. Children remember in the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe when Lucy and Susan came to the White Witch’s castle and they find Mr. Tumnus. Only he is a statue, under the witches’s spell. He’s helpless, He can’t do a thing. How does he come back to life? Aslan breathes on him. Did Mr. Tumnus bring himself back to life? No. It was all Aslan. Likewise unless the Holy Spirit raises the natural man from his spiritual death, he cannot come to Christ. How can a dead man make himself alive? Any “...notion that we can find God through our own reason, or intuition, or intellect, or humility, are cruel and misleading.”<sup>26</sup>

## Proven by our own experience

Dear congregation, just look at the world today. A plain, unbiased view of mankind proves what I’m saying. The world is not *merely* guilty before God. The world is in rebellion against Him. The evil that we see today in the world,

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<sup>25</sup> **Colossians 1:13** “He has delivered us from *the domain of darkness.*” **Acts 26:18** God sent Paul to the Gentiles “...to open their eyes, so that they may *turn from darkness to light* and from the power of Satan to God.”

<sup>26</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 131

the murder of babies, the mutilation of so-called transgender people, the hatred of all authority, the calling of good evil, and evil good—all of this is an attack on God Himself. The world hates God. The things of God are foolishness to it. And the world is enslaved in this position. It can't move off from it. The world is just like the men of Sodom and Gomorrah. Though God struck them with blindness, they still were groping for the door of Lot's house—they were still bent on doing evil. It doesn't matter how bad it gets, the unsaved man will never be convinced that the gospel is the answer. **Revelation 9:20-21** proves this out. Though God pours out plague after plague on the wicked, though His wrath is ever intensifying, we read "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, *did not repent* of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, *nor did they repent* of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." Why will they not repent? Why will they not turn to God? Because God is foolish to them. Because He is never able to understand God because God can only be understood by the Holy Spirit.

### **Are you a natural man?**

Perhaps you are here this morning, and you realize that you have not received the Holy Spirit. You are the natural man, you think the things of God are foolish. Don't you understand friend that you stand condemned right now. Were you to die today—this afternoon on the way home from this meeting—you will most certainly go to a place where the Bible says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's the place of outer darkness. It's the place where the lake of fire and sulfur is, where the smoke of your torment will rise up forever and ever. There will be endless wailing because the punishment is eternal. Why? Because you have rebelled against God. You have known that you owe Him worship, but you have honored Him. You have lived for yourself. You have thought His ways to be foolish and your own ways to be wise. God cannot tolerate that. Punishment is certainly coming. If you will not look to Jesus Christ and put your trust in Him, to be your Savior, you most certainly will

suffer condemnation. So then what can you do? This verse that we've been looking at says you are helpless. Cry out for mercy. Say "God give me your Holy Spirit so that I can believe. Take the spirit of the world out of me, and give me the Spirit of God. God empower me to know Your Son Jesus Christ. Empower me to trust in His name." Friend if you cry out to God in all sincerity like that, He will save you. The promise in Scripture is so clear: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;"<sup>27</sup> "Whoever has the Son has life;"<sup>28</sup> Jesus said "...whoever comes to me I will never cast out."<sup>29</sup> If you find yourself willing to believe in Christ. If you find that you are able to come to Him. If you find yourself thinking "these things aren't foolish things at all, these things are life *itself*." Then the Holy Spirit is choosing to give you life my friend. Embrace that life, honor Jesus, give glory to God, surrender to the Spirit leading you.

That's our **second point**: the natural man is in bondage to sin and death unless God the Holy Spirit sets Him free.

### III. The Mind of the Spiritual Man

#### The spiritual man vs. the natural man

Now Paul describes the Christian. Please look at the beginning of **v.15** "The spiritual person judges all things..." This verse is contrasting the Christian with the non-Christian. Paul just said the natural man cannot discern or judge —same Greek word—the things of the Spirit of God. But the spiritual man, that is, *the person filled with the Holy Spirit*, can. The point is not that as Christians we know all things, or are filled with a greater intelligence than the non-Christians. That's ridiculous. Rather the the point is that although the natural man cannot understand anything of the things of God, the spiritual man can. As **1 John 2:27** says "...the anointing that you received from him abides in you [the Holy

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<sup>27</sup> John 3:36

<sup>28</sup> 1 John 5:12

<sup>29</sup> John 6:37

Spirit], and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But...his anointing teaches you about everything..." We have the Holy Spirit shaped spectacles and therefore we are able to discern truth from error, and right from wrong. That is something the natural man is completely cut off from.

### **Judged by no one**

The second part of **v.15** says "The spiritual person judges all things, *but is himself to be judged by no one.*" Since the natural man cannot judge or discern (again same Greek word) the things of the Spirit of God, he cannot rightly judge the Christian whom the Spirit of God dwells in. Of course non-Christians are able to discern our faults. "But they cannot accurately [discern] our faith."<sup>30</sup> *Why* is it helpful for Paul to affirm this? *So what* that non-Christians cannot rightly discern our faith? Think about the particular temptation in the Corinthian Church. The pressure was to imitate the elitism of Greek culture. To not do so, would be to be an outcast, a cultural nobody. But this is precisely what Paul was calling them to do—to not be conformed to the wisdom of the world but to the wisdom of God. Which means they would be open to ridicule. Paul is saying "Why should you care? Their judgment of you matters not at all. They are ignorant." The judgment and ridicule of the world should never make us ashamed. Should we be ashamed of the brightness of the noon day sun, because the blind man can't see it?<sup>31</sup> Should we be ashamed of Mozart or Beethoven or Bach because the deaf man cannot hear it? No. The judgment of the natural man should not matter to us at all.

### **Who has understood the mind of the Lord?**

Paul then proves his point in **v.16** "*For* who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ." The first part of this verse Paul quotes from **Isaiah 40:13**, and it's a rhetorical question. The

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<sup>30</sup> MacArthur, pg. 65

<sup>31</sup> "...unless we choose to shut our eyes upon the brightness of the sun, because it is not seen by the blind." Calvin, pg. 116

answer is self-evident—of course no one can instruct the Lord. But if no one can instruct or judge the Lord. Then no one can judge us. Charles Hodge put this into a helpful syllogism.

No one can instruct the Lord.

We have the mind of the Lord.

Therefore no one can instruct or judge us.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, beloved, no one can pronounce you to be foolish for hoping in Christ, because that would be to pronounce the Lord Himself as foolish. We believe these things *not* because we made them up, *not* because we are unrealistic optimists. We believe these things because we have the mind of Christ.

### **The mind of the world**

Do you see the vastly different position you are in compared with the world? The world cannot see the things you see. The world sees what we are doing here as foolishness, it would counsel you to find a place where the real action is. The world would say to you: ‘if you must be a Christian, then at least be a trendy Christian, be a cutting edge Christian, a cool Christian.’ ‘If you are going to be a Christian at least listen to sermons that are funny and entertaining, or philosophical and smart.’ ‘If you are going to be a Christian, at least go to a Church where your non-Christian friends can come and not feel too bad about themselves.’ “Worldly wisdom” as Kim Riddlebarger says, “Worldly wisdom is fascinated with fame, celebrity, and power.”<sup>33</sup> Why? Because that is what feeds a disordered self-love. That’s what enables us to look down our noses at each other.

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<sup>32</sup> Hodge, pg. 45

<sup>33</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.,: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 74

## The mind of Christ

But we have the mind of Christ. We have something infinitely better than what the world can see or hear or imagine. Loved ones, we know things that the world knows nothing about. We know what it means to have our sins forgiven by God. Not theoretically forgiven, but experientially. The world uses the word “forgiveness” but they have never tasted it. But we are swimming in an ocean of forgiveness. “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (**Isaiah 43:25**).

*Because* we have the mind of Christ, we know what it is to hate sin rightly. If the world hates sin, it only hates because it’s inconvenient or because it hurts them personally. But because we have the mind of Christ, we hate sin because it dishonors our Lord. It smears the name of Him to whom we have been Betrothed. **Psalm 139:19-20** “Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.”

*Because* we have the mind of Christ, we know that God’s holiness and love are never at odds with one another. At best the world only knows a pretended holiness, a sanctimonious hypocritical holiness that is devoid of love. On the other hand, the world can only know a love that is sentimental and indulgent of every sin that is devoid of holiness. But since we have the mind of Christ, we know a God who is both holy and love. *Holy*, because God’s hatred of sin is never seen so terrible as on the cross. For God so hated sin, that He punished and crushed His only Son because of it.<sup>34</sup> But love, because God’s love of sinners is never seen so wonderful as on the cross. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>35</sup> The cross is the single, greatest act of God in the whole

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<sup>34</sup> “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

<sup>35</sup> John 3:16

universe.<sup>36</sup> Only we know that, because we have the mind of Christ. Beloved you were given this freely. What do you have to boast about? What do you have to glory in, save Christ alone?

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<sup>36</sup> Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA., The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 103

## Appendix: Answering objections<sup>37</sup>

### 1. Doesn't Jesus draw everybody?

But we would not do this verse justice unless we answered at least two objections, a Scriptural objection, and a theological objection. The Scriptural objection goes like this: “Yes the natural man is unable to come to Christ on his own. Yes Jesus said in **John 6:44** that “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” But Jesus also said in **John 12:32** “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw all people to myself.*” Therefore although the unsaved aren't able to come to Christ *in their own power*, since Christ draws all people, then they are enabled to come.” How do we answer that? Here's a helpful rule: when dealing with two seemingly contrary passages, a more careful exegesis is required, meaning we need to look at the text more carefully. Now if **John 12:32** is indeed saying that Jesus draws every single person, then it necessarily follows that Jesus will save every single person. Because Jesus says at the end **John 6:44** that everyone whom the Father draws He “...will raise him up on the last day”—meaning they will experience resurrection unto life—salvation. If God draws everybody, then everyone is saved. But we know that the Bible doesn't teach universalism. **John 12:32** must saying something different. What is the context? Well prior to this statement some Greeks came to see Jesus (v.20-21). The Jews at that time believed that the people who would be saved were the Jews or those that converted to Judaism. But Jesus on the heels of that says in effect, He will not just draw Jews to Himself, He will also draw Gentiles. He will draw *all people*—that is, both Jews and Gentiles—to Himself.

### 2. What about prevenient grace?

The second objection is more theological. There is a doctrine called **prevenient grace** that was developed by the Remonstrants who were followers of Jacob Arminius in the 17th century. Prevenient comes from a Latin word

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<sup>37</sup> Also answer: 3. Why then do we preach the gospel?

meaning preceding. The idea is that God gives all mankind this grace freeing them from the bondage of sin so they are enabled to believe. It doesn't guarantee that someone will believe, but it makes them able to believe, it gives them the opportunity to believe.<sup>38</sup> But we cannot accept this doctrine on three grounds. **First**, it is not supported by Scripture. The main Scripture<sup>39</sup> that is used to defend this doctrine is **John 1:9** which says "The true light [speaking of Christ], which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." In other words, "The coming of Jesus Christ into the world brought enough light to all people so that they are now able to reject or accept the message of the gospel."<sup>40</sup> But that is reading into the text. And it contradicts what John's gospel says later in **12:39-40** when, speaking of those who did not believe, says they "could not believe" *because* God "has blinded their eyes." Rather what **John 1:9** is saying<sup>41</sup> is that just as light exposes and reveals what is in the darkness, so "the coming of Jesus—the True Light—exposes and reveals where people are in their relationship to God."<sup>42</sup> This is what **John 3:19-21** essentially say. Those who are evil refuse to come to the light because they love the darkness. But those who do what is true gladly come to the light *so that his works may be shown to*

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<sup>38</sup> This doctrine of prevenient grace is also found in Roman Catholicism (though I'm not sure if they call it that). The Council of Trent declared that "the free will of man, moved and excited by God, can by its consent co-operate with God, Who excites and invites its action; and that it can thereby dispose and prepare itself to obtain the grace of justification. The will can resist grace if it chooses. It is not like a lifeless thing, which remains purely passive. Weakened and diminished by Adam's fall, free will is yet not destroyed in the race (Sess. VI, cap. i and v)." Rome anathematized any teaching that said man lost his free will: "CANON V.-If any one saith, that, since Adam's sin, the free will of man is lost and extinguished; or, that it is a thing with only a name, yea a name without a reality, a figment, in fine, introduced into the Church by Satan; let him be anathema."

<sup>39</sup> Also John 12:32 (which we've already addressed) and Romans 2:4 and Titus 2:11 (which upon a more careful exegesis will prove that these do not support prevenient grace).

<sup>40</sup> Source: [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/schreiner\\_prevenient.pdf](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/schreiner_prevenient.pdf)  
Accessed September 19, 2020

<sup>41</sup> For an alternative explanation of John 1:9 see my sermon "The Witness and the Light" (John 1:6-11) Essentially I make the argument that Jesus is the source of all intellectual knowledge (light) for all of humanity.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

*be accomplished by God.* In other words, the light of Jesus exposes every person for who they really are.

**Secondly**, if prevenient grace is true, then Paul has lost his entire argument in 1 Corinthians. The center of Paul's argument is **1:31** "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Prevenient grace does not destroy the ground of boasting. Why did I believe and my neighbor did not? We were both given grace to enable us to believe. But only I believed? Why? It must be something in me, something in me made me better than my neighbor. I have *ground* to boast because I made the right choice.<sup>43</sup>

**Thirdly**, and most tragically, if prevenient grace is true, then we who are saved owe no thanks to God for our salvation. Jonathan Edwards says it like this: "If the grace of God [doesn't determine our salvation] then [our] differing...from [the lost] is not owing to the goodness of God."<sup>44</sup> In other words, if God is not the deciding factor, then the only reason we are different from the lost is owing to ourselves. Logically we owe no thanks to God that we are saved and not others.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Paul knows nothing of this doctrine, and in fact necessarily excludes it. There are only two types of spirits, the spirit of this world which cannot come to the knowledge of God, or the Spirit of God which necessarily and effectually leads us to the knowledge of God: **2:12** "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."

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 559

<sup>45</sup> Edwards speaks about how this is the main difference between Reformed and Non-Reformed theology, cf. pg. 552.