

Return to the main theme

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 2, beginning to read at verse 4 and halfway through that verse. Genesis 2, verse 4.

I start in the phrase, It says, And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

And out of the ground the Lord made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And then turning over to our readings in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and reading there from verse 14. 1 Corinthians 2, 14.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

[2 : 02] The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?

But we have the mind of Christ. And I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as spiritual people, but as men and women of the flesh, even as babes in Christ.

I fed you with milk, not solid food, and you were not ready for it. And even yet, you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh.

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving like ordinary people? For when one says, I belong to Paul, and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not merely men and women?

Amen. May the Lord bless those readings from his word. May it be to his praise and to his glory. For some weeks now, we've been looking at this tangent that the apostle went off on when he had announced that the theme that he was going to address, certainly in the first four chapters, was the dissensions and quarreling that existed in the Corinthian church.

[3 : 31] And so then he stopped, before he got any further with that, and started an additional discussion on the preaching of the cross. God's purpose in it and his personal experience of it in Corinth.

He then went on to discuss this additional issue, which is secondary to it, namely the futility of wisdom.

When we come to chapter 3, we find that what he's doing now is returning to the main theme, namely the divisions and disunity of the church in Corinth.

And this is the way that he gets back to the main theme. He effectively says to the Corinthians, what sort of people are you?

Because in these verses in 1 Corinthians 2, that we read, 14, 15, 16, and then into chapter 3, there are effectively three different types of people that are being discussed.

[4 : 47] There is the unspiritual man, the spiritual man and woman, and the men and women who are of the flesh.

So let me direct your attention in the first instance to the failure of the unspiritual man. Verse 14, the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.

And he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The unspiritual man. And there is a term that's been used here in Greek, *chakikos*, which means unspiritual, not possessing the Spirit of God, non-spiritual, physical, or material.

And this Greek noun is derived from another Greek noun which is more familiar to us. And this is the word *chakik*, which means soul, from which the English words *psyche* and *psychology* are derived.

[6 : 01] So psychology is a study of the inner being of any person and the motives that are directing that person to act in certain ways.

So he's saying that the unspiritual people are devoid of the Spirit of God.

He says that in that verse that I've quoted, the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So here what is being said is that men and women who are in the world, who are unspiritual, are in a natural state of deprivation.

They are ignorant of what God can do by his Spirit. But this is not how men and women were created.

[7 : 08] In Genesis 1 and 27, we read this, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And then in that chapter that we read in verse 7, Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

So here are men and women who have been created in the image of God, created to know God, and as the Catechism says, to enjoy him forever.

So how is it that they are now in this state of deprivation? Now, this is a subject that occupied the mind of the Apostle Paul, and he directs your attention to it in Romans 5, verse 12.

He says this, Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all men and women have sinned.

[8 : 30] Thus, the solution to the problem as to how people are like this today has come about because of the sin of our original parents in the Garden of Eden.

You find it recorded in Genesis chapter 3. It is this event that has brought about the state of spiritual death that all people now find themselves in, so death spread to all men in that all have sinned.

If you're in any doubts about this, read the account of the fall in Genesis 3, immediately followed by Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Abel.

And here it was, we find, in the person of Cain, the sin of envy, the sin of jealousy, which brought about the murder of his brother the first time.

And in the book of Genesis, there is this clear teaching that mankind, you men and women, have fallen from this glorious estate because in Genesis chapter 14 is the first mention of war.

[9 : 51] This is the imprisonment that sin has brought about. It is the imprisonment that the Lord Jesus Christ in his ministry is setting people free from.

And so we read in 1 John chapter 3 that for this purpose, the Son of God was manifest to destroy the works of the devil.

And Jesus himself said, if the Son of Man shall set you free, you shall be free indeed. This is the situation. There is a liberation in the gospel.

A liberation in the life-giving words. So Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 2, verses 1 and 2 and says this, And you he made alive when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit is now at work among the sons and daughters of disobedience.

[11 : 12] This is what they were. They were dead, spiritually speaking, because of the sin nature with which they were naturally born.

You followed the course of this world. You followed the dictates of the prince of the power of the air. This is what you were doing.

But thanks be to God. He set them free. And this isn't only true for the Corinthians, the Ephesians, or people there in the first century.

It's true for us tonight. The word of the gospel has a living, a liberating power to it that can set you free.

The door of faith opened for the Corinthian people in Acts 18, verse 8. We read that Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the law together with all his household, and many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.

[12 : 29] So here is the record of the door opening of faith as far as the Corinthian people were concerned. So if that is the case, what is the problem?

The problem is that they had not grown as Christians the way they should have. So we come to chapter 3, verses 1 and 2.

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual men and women, but as men and women of the flesh, even as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it, and even yet you are not ready.

Now, in saying all of this, he is not saying that the Corinthians are unspiritual people. That is what he is not saying. And the proof of that is that he uses a different word.

This is the word *sarkinos*, which means belonging to the world, not under the control of the Spirit of God or human.

[13:46] they had never progressed sufficiently in the faith. Now, you remember this other noun that I use, *unspiritual*, means not possessing the Spirit of God, non-spiritual physical material.

Now, something different is indicated by these two nouns which are there in this first reading of 1 Corinthians. the natural position is that they do not possess the Spirit of God.

But Paul is not saying that. What he's saying is you're not under the control of the Spirit of God. And this is the real problem that's caused all this division, dissension, disunity, bad witness, call it what you will.

And he says, I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it, and even yet, you are not ready.

This is the problem with the Corinthian people. It is this that is the root of this disunity and this quarreling and division.

[15:14] Now, the writer to the Hebrews has something to say of a similar nature to his congregation. Hebrews 5, verses 11 and 12.

About this, that's the person of Jesus, we have much to say, which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

for by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word.

You need milk, not solid food. Now, these verses were written at a somewhat later time than the epistle to the Corinthians, but he has accurately diagnosed the problem and the need of the Hebrew Christians as well as providing the remedy.

And the remedy is this, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word.

[16:24] If that's true of the Hebrew Christians, it's equally true of what Paul is writing to the Corinthians. It's not just the case that he diagnoses what their problem is, but he also wants to provide them with a way forward so that they can leave this state behind them.

And what he commends to them is the teaching of God's word. Now, in chapter 11, verse 2, he says this, I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

So, here he's drawing their attention to something that they've done which is faithful, correct, and upright. So, what are these traditions that he's talking about?

for the first instance, the most important traditions for them, for us, are found in chapter 15, verses 1, 3, and 4.

And I would remind you, brothers and sisters, in what terms I preach to you the gospel. for I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

[18:09] Now, this is what he's saying here. This is what I've been teaching. It is based on the scripture, and as far as they're concerned, the scripture he's talking about is the Old Testament.

But more importantly, not only is it that it's based on scripture, this is something that he personally has received.

And what he's saying to the Corinthians is, this indeed is true of you. Not only are you directed to the teaching that's found in holy writ, the scripture of the Old Testament, the prophets, but you're directed also to your experience of the gospel.

That day when many of you believed, when Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, was the first one to receive Christ. Do you remember that experience?

This is what he's saying. Now, these elements of the gospel are not based on his opinions. As I've said, they're to be found in the scripture.

[19 : 25] When Paul writes to the Romans, he says this in the first two verses of chapter one. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures.

So, this is what you need to do, Corinthians. You need to get back to studying the written word. Because if you do this, and you listen to what God is saying, your experience will be turned round, and you will be new people.

This is the solution to the problem. But let's go on. Thirdly, the evidence of unspiritual people. This is four and five, chapter three. For you are still of the flesh, for while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh behaving like ordinary people?

For when one says, I belong to a Paul, and another, I belong to a polis, are you not merely human beings? This is the unspirituality of the Corinthians.

[21 : 01] and what he says here in verses four and five is virtually identical to what he said when he introduced this topic in chapter one.

Going back to these verses that we had already thought about, chapter one, verses eleven and twelve, it is being reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Cephas, which is Peter, or I belong to Christ.

In chapter eleven, he says, I hear that there are divisions among you in the way that you deal with the Lord's table. In chapter fifteen, he says, how is it that some among you say, there is no resurrection from the dead?

So you see what this is, this is a slippery slope because if people are being motivated by their natural spirit and not the spirit of God, the first sign of this is division.

[22 : 23] But the final fruit of it is denial of Scripture. I belong to Paul.

The witness of the church at Corinth had been impaired because of this set of problems. and it is for this reason that he set out on the topic of the preaching of the cross.

We consider that over the last three or four weeks. And this theme was begun in verse seventeen where he says this, Christ Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel not with eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

And when we thought about that, we thought about the contribution of the philosophers of the age such as Aristotle. We thought about the contribution of the Jewish experts in their law.

But what the apostle is saying is, I'm different to all of this. This is not what I'm saying. Anyone who thinks that I'm acting as a philosopher is totally wrong.

[23 : 46] And what he's trying to get across to them here in the introductory verses of chapter three is that as to who the preachers of the gospel are, this is totally unimportant.

What really matters is the gospel itself. Verse six, what then is Apollos?

What is Paul, servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each one? Now, the reason for this saying, what is Apollos?

What is Paul? Is that he has continually reminded them of their standing in the grace of God. Again, going back to chapter one and verses two and three, we consider this, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, in these verses, there were four points of their standing in grace. They were sanctified in Christ Jesus.

[25 : 19] They were the church of God in Corinth. They were called to be holy people, and they were exercising this very effective prayer ministry.

And the reason that he has said all this is he wants to develop their walk with God so that they will have an effective witness in the gospel.

And the answer, the way that he does this is to remind them of who they once were. It's in a chapter, it's actually later than what we're dealing with at the moment, but it's relevant.

Chapter 6, verses 9-11. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? do not be deceived. Neither the immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor homosexuals nor thieves nor greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God and such were some of you.

[26 : 38] but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God.

You see, what he's doing here is reminding them of what they were before they were converted. And it's quite a list, isn't it?

adulterers, immoral, homosexuals, thieves, revilers, robbers. But you were washed.

You're different people. so that once they would have been disqualified from the entry into the kingdom of God, yet by the intervention of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and his message of the gospel, they are these things no longer.

They are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that by this teaching ministry, which he has based solely on the word of God, i.e.

[27 : 54] the Old Testament, he has sought to build them up in the grace of God and direct their attention to the message of the gospel and not the messenger.

Now then to chapter 2, he gives them an aim of what this is going to be like. Verses 15 and 16. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. Here is a state of spiritual maturity which they are to aim for.

A state whereby they will know the will of God and that every matter they think about whether it's worship, personal living, witness, outreach, whatever, they will have the mind of Christ on it.

Is that an arrogant statement? No, it's not. we have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

[29 : 27] To get the Corinthians to turn around in their experience, there has to be a name. There has to be a vision. And the prophets were continually giving an aim and a vision.

Think this. When the temple was rebuilt after the exile, the work on rebuilding it stopped. And Haggai the prophet said this, who is left amongst you who remembers this house in its former glory. And how do you see it now? Oh Corinthians, do you remember the first blood of your love for the Lord Jesus Christ?

What are you doing with it right now? And so the challenge of this word is for us to examine where we are in the grace of God.

A challenge that gives us an aim and a vision. A challenge that comes to us because of a lost world. A challenge that incentivizes us to move on into the things that are yet to be discovered.

[31 : 02] And there are plenty things that God has in store for those who love him. Amen. We sing in line with this.