

Those who have the spirit of God dwelling within are equipped to discern the “deep things of God” spoken of in I Corinthians 2. The natural man, that is man without the spirit, is not able to understand the things of God because they are spiritually discerned.

I Corinthians 2:14 and 15

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

But he that is spiritual judgeth [discerns] all things, yet he himself is judged [discerned] of no man.

The mind of the Lord is so vast, with unimaginable knowledge and incomparable wisdom, that no one can approach instructing Him. The greatest intellectual human wisdom is nothing compared to the mind of the Lord. Yet, as Christians, we are told that with the holy spirit we have the capacity to understand like Christ.

Verse 16

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

The spirit is given to guide, teach, and lead us into the all truth. With the spirit, God provided a way to know “the things that are freely given to us of God.” However, having the ability to understand that which God chooses to reveal does not automatically ensure we will do so. Ours is a choice: to walk by the spirit or by the flesh. To be spiritually minded requires the discipline to stay focused on God and things of God. Many are the distractions which will steer us into being carnally minded.

The Corinthian believers allowed themselves to be seduced into carnal (fleshly) thinking and behavior. They were tempted with the same things we all face today, that is fighting over which man to follow. God called them “babes in Christ.” They had the potential to know the “deep things of God” but chose to behave like babies. This caused them to be very limited in receiving the mutual understanding available to those who maintain spiritual-mindedness.

I Corinthians 3:1-3

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ.

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able.

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Envy, strife, and divisions (factions) are the thoughts and actions of the carnally minded. Whenever we allow these thoughts, for whatever reason, we have abandoned thinking like Christ. We can be well assured the Corinthians thought they were taking a stand for what they believed was right. However, often an honest, sincere desire to believe, think, and speak accurately about God moves to a presumptuous conviction that our beliefs contain the whole truth about God. The practical effect is that of confining God to our very limited understanding. A sincere desire to maintain the integrity of God’s Word slips into narrow-mindedness and closed-mindedness. When we have this posture of mind, it is a very small step to criticizing, condemning, and fearing all those who believe differently.

Loyalty to a man or an organization which leads us into carnal-mindedness is obsessive thinking beyond the boundaries communicated in God’s Word. Loyalty to those who teach or shepherd us is not uncommon or wrong in and of itself. However, our primary loyalty and trust belongs to God and to Him alone.

Too often we think loyalty to our minister is the same as loyalty to God. This misunderstanding is addressed by Paul in this section. He understood his proper relationship to the believers and desired for them to understand their relationship to him and Apollos.

Verses 4-7

For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Paul did not want people to follow him blindly or elevate him to a position in their minds which should only belong to God. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but the increase in their lives came from God. Therefore, God is the One to glorify, trust, and follow.

A genuine minister of God is clear on his responsibilities. He is a minister of reconciliation. All his efforts are to be focused in one direction — bringing people into a harmonious loving relationship with their Father, God. Such a minister would rather die than allow himself to be revered in the stead of God.

We are often encouraged in the Word of God to search the scriptures to determine God's truth. We are told to allow the spirit of God within to guide and teach us. We are never told to accept what a man says about God to be the absolute truth simply because he said it. Any minister who presents himself as "the" authority for truth is a liar. Anyone who follows such a one is a fool.

There have been, and still are, many great men and women who teach God's Word. For each we should have respect and thankfulness. However, we should never forget, as great as any man may be, he is just a man. All of us as humans make mistakes. No man has a complete comprehension of the whole Word of God nor does any always teach accurately. God's Word is true and Jesus Christ is the head of the body. We must take the responsibility that is ours to determine our beliefs by relying on God in Christ in us and not on other people.

Paul was a genuine minister for God and ensured that those he helped glorified God. He did not desire the accolades of men. He understood God would reward his works.

I Corinthians 3:8

Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

Whenever we assist in bringing someone to Christ or help a brother to walk godly, we experience great joy. This joy is God's reward for us here and now. Yet, we are told there will also be rewards for us when Christ returns.

Ministers, such as Paul and Apollos, were fellow-workers with God. But the Church is God's garden, God's building.

Verse 9

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.

The wise master builder understands the foundation to the building is Jesus Christ. Many different supplies are needed to erect a building and a variety of skilled laborers are required. Paul's contribution was needed, as was that of Apollos. Today, we each have our own unique service to render to build the Church of Christ. Each is significant and each is needed. We are not in competition with each other, rather we are to be fellow-laborers. Every one of us must always acknowledge the foundation is Jesus Christ, and we must be careful to build as God leads.

Verses 10-12

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

The work that each man does will at last be brought to light and examined.

Verse 13

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

Christians have already been judged in Christ and made to be righteous in the sight of God. We have already been promised eternal life. However, our works will be judged. We will be rewarded for our godly works. Those works which are not according to godliness will be burned with fire and we will bear the

loss. Yet, we will still have salvation. There are rewards in addition to the promise of eternal life.

Verses 14 and 15

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

God does not tolerate those who defile His temple.

Verses 16 and 17

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

Envy, strife, and factions can be eliminated if we will have the correct perspective towards those who minister. We should be thankful for and respectful of all those who serve in the church. However, we must be careful not to allow this gratitude and respect to exceed that which is proper. No man is to be revered above God. No one is to be blindly followed. We should never surrender the control of our beliefs or life to any other individual. Above all, we must always ensure that God, and God alone, is the object of our worship.

Paul understood his proper relationship to God and people. He conducted his ministry in a manner which led people to God and not himself. He told the believers to regard him and Apollos only as ministers.

I Corinthians 4:1

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

The Greek word translated "minister" here is *hupēretes*, literally meaning "under rowers." A whole team of under rowers pulling the oars is required to move a large vessel through the water. Each rower is significant, but none own the ship, and none are the captain. God is the owner of our ship, and Jesus Christ is the captain. Paul was not the main man; Apollos was not the main man; your minister is not the main man. Jesus Christ is the main man!

Faithfulness is the primary requirement for a steward. His concern is the approval of God, not others.

Verses 2 and 3

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

Paul was not concerned about the judgement of others. He did not even judge himself. He believed that the Lord was the One Who judged him. Every minister is tempted to seek the approval of those he serves. This temptation must be resisted, or he will compromise his ministry. The Lord's judgement is the only one that matters.

Verse 4

For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

We are absolutely powerless to judge another person effectively. Therefore, we are commanded not to judge. The Lord is coming, and He will judge the heart of each man. At that time each will receive from God such praise and reward as he deserves.

Verse 5

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.