

## **“Natural” And “Spiritual” Men**

*“Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things and he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14-16).*

There are two major views about the “*natural man*” and the “*spiritual man*” of this text. Since the apostle has just discussed the Spirit in inspiring men (vss. 10-13); it is the judgment of some that the “*natural*” man is the “uninspired man;” the “*spiritual man*” is he who is inspired. Because of the close proximity of the discussion of inspiration to this passage, it is evident that the apostles either continues the discussion of that subject or else has abruptly changed the subject. On the other hand, there are those who consider that the “*natural*” and “*spiritual*” men of the text are those who are either “carnally” or “spiritually” minded. While there is some merit to identify the natural man as the uninspired man and the spiritual as the inspired one; it seem to me that the greater evidence points toward the natural man being the man with a carnal mind; the spiritual man being a man with a spiritual mind. Consider the following reasons.

It was not unusual for the apostle to abruptly change a subject he has discussed to a second, unrelated one. One only need look at the 1 Corinthians 12 where the writer describes spiritual gifts to 1 Corinthians 13 where he gives the delightful description of love or again to the eighth chapter where he deals with eating meats offered to idols, changing drastically to a discussion of the right of preachers to receive support (1 Cor. 9:1-14); then turning to exhortation to be steadfast (1 Cor. 9:24-27) and then to warning of the danger of falling (1 Cor. 10:1-13); only to return once more to eating meats offered in sacrifice to idols (1 Cor. 10:14-33)!

Second, note that the “*natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him.*” If the “*natural man*” equates the uninspired man, that means that uninspired men reject the things of the inspired man as “*foolishness.*” This is true of some, but it is not true of all uninspired men, neither in that first century nor in our 21st century. And if, as some hold, the “*natural man*” is the uninspired man, then today all of us are “*natural.*” Do all today reject the inspired writings as “*foolishness*”? Admittedly, many do but not all, for many today accept the inspiration of the scriptures. The apostles were inspired on Pentecost (they spake as the Spirit gave them utterance); but those who were uninspired were pricked in their hearts and asked Peter and the other apostles what they should do to be

saved. Were these Pentecostians the "*natural man*" of 1 Corinthians 2? Certainly not.

Finally, 3:1 is tied with this exegesis on the natural and spiritual man for the verse begins with the word "*and*." He wrote, "*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ*" (1 Cor. 3:1). He further identifies their being "*natural*" as he explains, "*for ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men?*" (1 Cor. 3:3). These Corinthians were "*natural*" men, but not because they were uninspired (for some of them may have been inspired); they were natural men because they allowed the carnal man to govern their lives; evidenced by the jealousy and strife among them.

Can we have "*spiritual men*" today? We would have to respond "no" if the "*spiritual*" man of 1 Corinthians 2 is the inspired man. But, when Paul urged that "*those who were spiritual*" restore those overtaken in a trespass, did he mean that these spiritual men were to be inspired men or rather mature who had the courage to look at their own selves as they sought to restore another; and who had a spirit of gentleness? Were those who were "*spiritual*;" spiritually-minded? Surely a thoughtful person recognizes that the spiritual man of Galatians 6:1 is the mature Christian who then may have been inspired but who today cannot lay claim to such yet who is "*spiritual*" because he has the mind (attitude) of Christ?

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