

The Natural Person vs The Spiritual Person

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[0 : 00] I am preparing for speaking with you today. One of the things that I use is I put on some music so that I can block out the things that are around me and I focus in on the preparation.

And one of my favorite bands for this uses a combination of musical styles. And I'm going to let you know kind of what, a little bit of what they sound like. They use traditional bagpipes.

They're most certainly a rock band. They have thematic elements to their albums. And so the album I listen to most is a steampunk album.

And to add into this mix, they're from Arizona. And I'm like, Arizona just doesn't seem to fit with any of that. But somehow in putting this music together, it works for me.

It works for me. I like it. It's not for everyone. In today's message, we're going to be combining some different elements. The first thing that we're going to be doing is we're going to be combining our study of 1 Corinthians.

[1 : 10] And so we started that a few weeks back and we're going to be continuing our study of 1 Corinthians, which is a letter to a young struggling church that is struggling with errors and not following God as they should.

And the second aspect, Merry Christmas. We're going to have elements of the Christmas story weaving into this. And in putting these things together, putting these two elements together, this letter to the 1 Corinthians and the Christmas story, my hope is that we can use this combination to make beautiful, melodious music.

It is possible, though, it is possible that I will make a dissonant and harmonious mess. We shall see.

As we go through our sermon this morning, here will be the outline. We're going to look at four different sections. And in each of those sections, we're going to be a comparison of two elements.

Also, in each one of those sections, we'll be incorporating part of the Christmas stories as examples of what is being taught in that. Section number one, this is dealing with verses one through five.

[2 : 28] Section number one is communicating the gospel. Will we be ignored versus heard? So once again, communicating the gospel. Will we be ignored versus heard?

So once again, the context that we're in here in 1 Corinthians is that this is a church that is filled with divisions. They are filled with people who are arguing with one another, people who are not getting along.

And also as part of this division, is they are a group who is very spiritually immature. They are a growing group, a young church. And they have errors in belief and errors in conduct.

What we saw in chapter one is that the church has been enamored with personalities. The church has been enamored with social status. The church has been enamored with these particular people who have this particular allegiance.

Next thing that you see is that the church has been enamored with intellectualism, the wisdom of the day. And so they have gravitated and revolved themselves around that which seems wise by the day's standards.

[3 : 34] What we'll find today is that Paul dulls his personality. He dulls his intellectualism in order to share the gospel. So here now from verse one, as we hear from Paul, the author of this letter to the Corinthian church.

And he says there in verse one, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech, it's his personality, or wisdom within intellectualism.

So Paul says, I didn't come with lofty speech or wisdom. Instead, Paul has used a simplistic approach to communicating the gospel.

He says there in verse two, he says, I proclaim to you, Jesus Christ and him crucified. And he has presented this message with fear and much trembling.

He hasn't used a snazzy personality. He hasn't wowed them with who he is. Instead, he has come with fear and much trembling. And we see in the next verse there, in verse four, that he's also come and presented this message with the spirit and power.

[4 : 47] He hasn't relied upon his intellectualism. He hasn't relied upon his education, which is expanse and vast and great. He hasn't wowed them with his knowledge. Instead, he was relied upon spirit and power.

So Paul has skewed the extravagant. He has moved away from lofty speech and wisdom. And instead, he has proclaimed an unadorned message, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

As we see the approach that Paul is taking here with the Corinthian church, I want us to contrast it to Paul's approach when he was in Athens.

Now, the book of Acts actually records Paul's visit to this very church. And it takes place in Acts 18. Just prior to that, in Acts chapter 17, we have Paul, he was in Athens.

And it records Paul's experience there. And what we find there in Acts chapter 17 is that Paul encounters a group of philosophers.

[5 : 55] He encounters the Epicureans and the Stoics. And he begins to engage them. And part of the place he engages them is in the marketplace. And out in the public space and in the public square.

And in engaging them there, they invite him to come and speak at the Areopagus. They say, Paul, we want to hear from you in this place of wisdom and intellect. We want to hear what you have to say.

And then Paul, as he goes to speak to the intellectuals of the day, to the philosophers of the day there in Athens, he begins by saying, men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

And then he follows that up. He says, and in fact, you're so religious, you have an altar to the unknown God. He says, well, let me take a moment and explain to you who this unknown God is.

Well, it's the Lord God of heaven. We see Paul there as he is communicating the gospel in Athens is that he is relying very much on his personal aspects.

[7 : 00] He is relying very much on his charisma. You can see him engaging the people of Athens in a powerful way. He's also relying upon his intellect as he is trying to sway the philosophers of the day of the validity of who God is.

This is quite in contrast to what we find Paul doing in Corinth. In Corinth, Paul intentionally seems to have avoided relying upon any personal aspects.

He's not relied upon his charisma or his intellect to present the gospel. While in Athens, Paul seems to be relying upon all of these things.

Putting these two instances together, here's what we can see. First, we see that the gospel, it does not change. The gospel never changes. The gospel is good news about Jesus.

The communication of the gospel, however, is situational and can depend upon the circumstances. Let me provide a personal note.

[8 : 10] I find myself communicating to people a lot. That's part of what I do in my workplace, is communicate. And here's what I have discovered. Communication is not what you say. Communication is what is heard.

When we communicate the gospel, let's strive to be heard. Maybe we communicate the gospel in simple terms, just like Paul did to the church in Corinth.

Maybe we say it's Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Maybe we utilize our intellect, our education. Maybe we use that.

You know what? And if you have a snazzy personality, maybe you use that too. If it can be helpful to make the gospel understood to those who are around us, then let us strive to do that.

There is a profound biblical example of the gospel, the message of Jesus being made known to people. And that comes from the wise men. The wise men who learned of Jesus' birth.

[9 : 15] One of the things that we see with the birth of Jesus is that the birth of Jesus, Jesus was for everyone. He was for all nations and all people.

And in the story of the scriptures, we find in Matthew 2, the wise men who lived in the east, far away from where Jesus was, and really far out of the world view of which Jesus was born into.

These men are nowhere near Jerusalem. They're nowhere near Bethlehem. And these men, they divine messages from the stars.

That's how they look and guide themselves. It's by what they see from the stars. By the way, this is a practice that is explicitly condemned in the scriptures. In the scriptures, we're taught, don't look to the stars to get your message.

But that's where these people look to understand things. So to learn of Jesus, God used a medium the wise man would understand.

[10 : 13] God put a star in the sky because that's where they were looking. God wanted them to hear about Jesus. God wanted them to know about Jesus.

And God says, I'm going to tell you in a way that you can understand. I'm putting a star in the sky. And as we see from the scriptures, what do the wise men do? They see that star and they say, it's the king of the Jews.

Let us go that way. As we go moving on to the next section, what we've seen so far from this one is that Paul commuted the gospel in a direct and bland form, intentionally not relying upon charisma or intellect.

We're going to see the reason for this approach here in the next section. So the second section that we're looking at is wisdom. Temporary versus eternal. That's verses six through nine.

So once again, the second section is wisdom. Temporary versus eternal. Wisdom is used in contrasting terms here in this passage.

[11 : 25] And there's two kinds of wisdom that is referenced. There is a personality-driven wisdom that relies upon intellect of the day. I'm going to be referring to that as temporary wisdom.

There is also wisdom that is God-oriented that comes from our understanding of who God is. I'm going to be referring to that as eternal wisdom.

The scriptures here provide an example of these two different types of wisdom. And it's almost like there's two tables that have been put forward. And on the one side of the table, we see temporary wisdom.

On the other side of the table, we see it contrasted with eternal wisdom. Temporary wisdom is mentioned in verse six. It's described as the wisdom of this age.

That means it seems right at the time. But only in the short term. It has a very short perspective, a small perspective. It has the perspective only of this moment, of this time.

[12 : 30] And we see that it is used by rulers who are doomed to pass away. The rulers will pass away and so will this wisdom that is with them.

Next, in verse seven, we have eternal wisdom. And it is described as wisdom from God. And it's secret and it's hidden to temporary wisdom.

And we also see with eternal wisdom that it is decreed by God before the ages. Hence, it's eternal quality because it has come with God even before the ages.

Next, in verse eight, we see once again temporary wisdom mentioned. And it says, there in verse eight, none of the rulers of this stage understood this, this wisdom of God.

And one of the things that we see with temporary wisdom is it does not know God. It does not understand who God is. And in fact, the passage tells us that because of their ignorance, this temporary wisdom, because of the ignorance of the people who used it, they crucified the Lord of glory.

[13 : 46] Next verse, we have eternal wisdom listed again. And we see that there in verse nine, eternal wisdom is described. This fullness of this wisdom is hidden from people.

It's not seen. It's not heard. In fact, it's not even imagined. But in the fullness of time and the completion of things, this wisdom will be accessible by our love for God.

Key point that comes out of this is that temporary wisdom, the wisdom of this age functions ignorantly of God.

As a result of this temporary wisdom, it cannot discern God. It cannot understand who God is. When it comes to this idea of God, temporary wisdom will reduce God to mystery, that kind of unknown thing out there.

fear. It might reduce God to indifference. That's good for you. That's great. That's not for me. It might reduce God to ridicule.

[15 : 01] How foolish, how simple-minded are those people who would follow God. We also see that temporary wisdom cannot follow God.

Temporary wisdom is unable to follow the ways of God. Just like you cannot walk along an unseen path, temporary wisdom cannot follow God.

Now, as you walk, try to find your way along an unseen path, there might be moments where you occasionally intersect with it, but you cannot follow it. So also, temporary wisdom might occasionally intersect with God's wisdom, but it cannot follow it.

These limitations of temporary wisdom, they were true when Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church two millennia ago. These limitations are still true today.

As we think of this idea of temporary wisdom versus eternal wisdom, I want us to look at an example that comes from the Christmas story.

[16 : 19] And it comes from Joseph, who learns that his fiancée is pregnant. And as we look at this example, I want you to think about what advice would you give Joseph?

If Joseph were your friend, and he were describing this situation to you, what advice would you give him? If you were relying upon temporary wisdom, I think he would tell Joseph, stay away from Mary.

With eternal wisdom, we know it was all part of God's plan. So here's what happens in the story. Joseph and Mary are espoused.

And what that means is that they had the permanence of marriage and the privileges of engagement. So when Joseph discovers that is espoused that Mary is pregnant, he is quite concerned because they have not consummated their relationship.

And so upon learning of this and realizing that Mary is pregnant, he begins to follow the path of temporary wisdom. He resolves to divorce her quietly and end the relationship that he has with her.

[17 : 33] And we would say with Joseph's limited information, at that time, he is making absolutely the right choice. We would understand why he is making that choice.

I don't think people, even God following people, would not fault Joseph for his plans to not Mary Mary. And as Joseph is considering these things, an angel comes and speaks to Joseph in a dream.

And this angel provides this information. The angel says, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. This encounter with the angel moves Joseph's perception of the matter.

He's no longer viewing this pregnancy from a human perspective. He's no longer viewing this pregnancy with temporary wisdom. Instead now, he is being given greater insight and greater understanding.

[18 : 49] And he's going to view this pregnancy from God's perspective. He's going to view this pregnancy from the perspective of eternal wisdom. And he's going to take a very different approach to it with this new information.

As we think in our own lives, as followers of Jesus Christ, we will have moments where we need to turn away from the wisdom of this age.

We will have moments where we need to say, no, that's temporary wisdom, wisdom, and I need to follow the wisdom that comes from God. The challenge that will come is that there will be very well meaning, respectable people who when they hear of your decision to eschew temporary wisdom, they will try to dissuade you.

Just think if you were Joseph's friends, what advice would you have given him? One of the things that we have seen from this section is that there is a limitation to the wisdom of this age.

We're going to have a little bit more understanding into this matter as we look into the next section as we're going to see about the power of God and the power of the Spirit of God.

[20 : 11] Section number three is going to be Spirit, the world versus God. It's verses 10 through 13. So once again, it's section three. We're looking at the Spirit, world versus God.

So what Spirit guides our actions? Is it the Spirit of the world or the Spirit of God? The description of the Spirit of God takes place here in this section.

We see beginning there in verse 10 is that the Spirit reveals God to people. that is how people come to an understanding of God. It is the work of the Spirit in their life.

And that is why perhaps you have tried to communicate the message of God to other people and had no response for them. When it comes, we need a work of the Spirit to reveal God.

We also see that the Spirit searches the depths of God. God. And then we see in verse 11 that the Spirit comprehends the thoughts of God.

[21 : 22] Now let us see a description of the Spirit of the world, which is not like the Spirit of God. Let us see there in verse 12 we find a definition, an understanding of the Spirit of this world.

It tells us, now we have not received the Spirit of the world. So who is the we in this church? Who is the ones who have not received the Spirit of the world?

It is the church. This is a letter to the church. And so the church has not received the Spirit of the world. The Spirit of the world is not for the church.

The Spirit of the world guides those who are outside. But we as people of the church are able to follow the Spirit of God. We are able to understand God.

We see that with the work of the Spirit, we might be able to follow who God is. It tells us in verse 12 that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

[22 : 32] We also find that this Spirit teaches the knowledge of God. it teaches about who God is. It says, we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit.

The Spirit provides insight and knowledge. The Spirit should be guiding the church and giving it information. God is to follow God more closely, to make bold decisions on behalf of God.

The question that we will find is, how do we use this insight? How do we use this knowledge of which the Spirit empowers us? we find an example of someone who is informed by the Spirit in the Christmas story.

And that will come from Simeon. And Simeon is someone who is in the temple. And he is in the temple worshipping God. And we find that Simeon is described as righteous and devout.

and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And following the birth of Jesus, eight days later, he is brought into the temple for dedication.

[23 : 54] And when he is brought into the temple for dedication, Simeon is filled with the Spirit and has an understanding of who Jesus is.

He looks upon this child that has entered the temple. And he sees this is the Savior of the world. This is the one to whom the prophets look forward to.

This is the one to whom God promised. This is the Messiah. This is the Christ. And there were many people in the temple that day.

And many people saw Mary and Joseph bring that young infant into the temple. But we find Simeon, unlike most of the people in the temple that day, was able to look upon him and see who he really was.

Simeon there proclaims as he sees this baby Jesus. He says, Lord, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your words.

[25 : 02] For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

many people saw the baby that day. Simeon, as a result of the Spirit, saw the Christ.

He saw the Messiah. Think back for just a moment. We were talking about Joseph and how Joseph needed to ignore the wisdom of his age, the wisdom of the age.

What we see now in this section is that there are times that we need to listen to the Spirit. As we think of putting these two things together, ignore the wisdom of the age, and listening to the Spirit, we find ourselves a result.

At times, we need to be able to move forward based upon the leading of the Spirit. And when we move forward, those times, it might be that we need to ignore the wisdom of the age and embrace the leading of God's Spirit upon our life.

[26 : 23] And when we make these decisions, we will find that these decisions might be doubted by conventional wisdom. These decisions might be doubted by co-workers or mentors in your workplace.

people who love you and only seek the very best for you. These decisions where we follow the leading of the Spirit might be doubted by well-meaning friends, even well-meaning friends who are part of your church family.

And these decisions at times might even be doubted by spiritual mentors. They might say to you, look at it from this perspective.

And hopefully a good spiritual mentor would say, you need to follow the Spirit. They might say to you, I don't quite see it, but you need to follow the Spirit.

being led by the Spirit is not easy. There are moments when you are led by the Spirit that you will need to make a bold choice.

[27 : 39] And when you make that choice, it will feel very lonely. But we know that we have the Spirit with us. And as difficult as those choices might feel, ignoring the leading of the Spirit is far worse.

Fourth section that we want to look at is going to be the person. Natural versus the spiritual. That's going to be verses 14 through 16.

So once again, the fourth section is the person. Natural versus spiritual. The natural person here in the Scripture is described as how they relate to God.

And in verse 14, we see that the natural person does not accept the Spirit of God. Also, the Spirit of God to the natural person seems like folly.

And the natural person cannot understand these things. The spiritual person, however, there in verse 15, we find that they are able to judge all things.

[28 : 50] and they are able to be judged by new one. Now, judgment seems like an odd quality to introduce at this point.

We want to keep the context of what's taking place in our understanding of this passage. Within the Corinthian church, so this letter is to church and court.

So within this church, there are divisions, there are these factions of superiority, people who think they're better, more spiritual than others.

There is also spiritual immaturity. They have wrong beliefs and wrong conduct. One of the problems with spiritual immaturity is that the immature do not realize their deficiencies.

They don't know what they don't know, and that can lead to problems. problems. And part of this is as in this unhealthy context where we have divisions in spiritual maturity.

[29 : 58] The author is making this point. The spiritual person, the one who is guided by the spirit of God, the spiritual person is able to speak on God's behalf.

They are able to be God's advocate in this situation. as God's advocate in this tense situation, in this divisive situation, the spiritual person can judge others, can say, that's wrong, this is right.

You should stop doing this, and you should start doing that. Also, we find that the spiritual person then is above the judgment of the natural person.

So those who are not empowered by the spirit of God don't have the same ability to judge those who are powered by God, powered by the spirit, because the natural person doesn't understand the ways of God.

So their judgment would be in error and not correct. We see here that the capacity to judge a situation, to judge a situation in this church, comes from a person's understanding of God.

[31 : 13] We see in verse 16, it says, for who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? It's a rhetorical question coming from Isaiah chapter 40 verse 18.

No one's understood the mind of the Lord, so no one can question him. Yet we see it here in verse 16, the spiritual person does have the mind of Christ.

And with this with the mind of Christ, this spiritual person finds himself in a point where they are equipped to judge and lead this church in Corinth.

And just a note on this, it seems here that the author, Paul, is setting himself up to be able to speak very directly and bluntly and in judgment at times of this church.

we will see as we move forward in our study of 1 Corinthians. There's a possible misinterpretation of this passage. The spiritual person could say, I can judge you, you can't judge me, woohoo, and while they wouldn't quite say it with that sound in their voice, they might be thinking it with that in their head.

[32 : 30] And the spiritual person can become aloof, an elite. They begin to think, oh, I've got some sort of extra blessing, extra insight. There's things I understand that you're not able to see because of your simple mindedness.

And once again, while they might not say it, they might think it. And this results in spiritual elitism. And that's obviously wrong. As I say it with that voice, you know it's wrong.

As I say it to you, you're like, that's terrible, that's a bad idea. And part of it as we come to this type of misuse of this passage, what could be a misuse of this passage?

One of the things is that we find that mentality is absolutely disjointed from the rest of scripture. The spiritual elitism is not something you find in place in the scripture. We're all in need of Jesus.

We're all sinners. There's not the spiritual elitism. The second thing that we can even think here in this context as we look at that is that a big problem in the Corinthian church was spiritual elitism.

[33 : 33] these people thought they were better than other people. So being better than another person isn't going to solve the problem of being better than another person. Actually I think it's probably just going to make it worse.

So as we look at this we've seen a natural person the natural person cannot follow the things of God. The spiritual person however does understand the things of God.

As we think of this difference between the natural person and the spiritual person I want you to reflect upon the shepherds who learned of Jesus' birth.

So the shepherds are out in the night working and their night is interrupted unexpectedly. And there in verse 2 we find that angels suddenly appear with a message about Jesus' birth.

They say to the shepherds I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. the angels then provide the shepherds with a place and a sign the place being the city of David that's Bethlehem and a sign you will find the baby in a manger.

[34 : 43] The angels begin to praise God glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. So the question I have for you is how will the shepherds respond to this?

And while we know the ending of the story that the shepherds do go to find who Jesus is I must ask you how would a natural person respond to this situation? And while we might like to think that the natural person would say wow I've just encountered angels I've got to go see what they're talking about I feel like I know some natural people who would say hmm that's interesting just quite not my thing oh I think I must have got hit on the head by something and heard something natural people would come up with all sorts of reasons why that's not the work of God and when they encounter the work of God they simply disregard they come up with some sort of natural explanation for these supernatural events the spiritual person however is going to follow the pattern of the shepherd and the pattern of the shepherd said let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the

Lord has made known to us and they went with haste that's what the spiritual person does they hear Jesus and they say let us go with haste as we come to the conclusion of the message this morning I have a question for you are you a natural person did you hear the message that the angels brought to the shepherds I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people that is the message of the angels to the shepherd and that is the message to each of us today be you a spiritual person be you a natural person there is good news of great joy and what is that good news that good news is Jesus saves and if you are a natural person I have more encouraging news for you today there are spiritual people in this room but at one time the spiritual people in this room were natural people and they chose to embrace that message of good news they chose to embrace that message that Jesus saves at some point we find ourselves with the offer will we accept the message that Jesus saves at the very start of my message this morning

I spoke of my music choice when I was getting ready and it's unusual combination of styles I mentioned today that we were a bit of an unusual combination of content my stated hope before we started is that we would use this unusual combination to make beautiful melodious music the possibility it was possible I might have made a dissonant and harmonious mess but if you're a natural person here's what I want you to hear today if you are a natural person I think there is the distinct possibility that your life is a dissonant in harmonious mess and you may have covered it up with some sort of veneer of earthy success but inside you are a mess my hope for you today is that you will accept the salvation that Jesus offers and bring a beautiful harmony to your life let me close this in prayer

God we come before you this morning and we are thankful God that you did send your son into this world God we are thankful for the great love that you have for us God that you have made a way for us to have fellowship and peace with you God and that is through the work of your son Jesus Christ God we come before you this morning and give you the glory and the honor for the great salvation that you have provided amen