

February 28, 2020  
Sunday Evening Service  
Communion  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## WHEN GOD NO LONGER SPEAKS 1 Corinthians 2:12-16

In the ancient days, times like the Old Testament days, the possibility of famine was frightening and always present. Famines could wipe out thousands of people. Throughout ancient history, famines were known to eradicate whole people groups. Worse is that God promised famine as a form of judgment on His people if they chose to disobey Him by ignoring His law and His messages delivered by His messengers. To that end, at the outset of settling the Promised Land God warned, *“You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off”* (Deuteronomy 28:38-40).

Little was as fearful as a famine that caused starvation. However, God warned of a famine that is far worse than the loss of food. God warned that in response to His people’s continued disobedience He would send a famine of His words as judgment. Through the prophet Amos God warned, *“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land – not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD”* (Amos 8:11).

There are a few examples of this kind of horrible, deadly famine in the Old Testament. For example, King Saul got full of himself and decided he didn’t need God or God’s messengers telling him what to do. But then when he faced a strong enemy, he tried to get God to talk to him but it was futile. God was silent. *And when Saul inquired of*

*the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets* (1 Samuel 28:6).

Then there was the slow learner King Jehoshaphat who always tried to get hooked up with wicked King Ahab and his family up in Israel. One time he sought the Lord’s guidance about going to battle as Ahab’s ally. After hearing the false prophets encourage the unholy alliance, Jehoshaphat asked *“Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?”* (2 Chronicles 18:6). Old Ahab finally conceded to give an audience to God’s messenger Micaiah who strictly warned the two kings that the battle would not go well for them. Long before that event, Ahab had chosen to trade God in on the more popular model Baal. Now he could not hear God.

The Old Testament is not the only place in the Bible where God warns about a famine of His Word. In the New Testament letter Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth, he warned about the inability to hear God speak. Frankly, most people don’t care. That is a pretty good indication that most of the people in our world, our culture, and sometimes our circle of acquaintances are not born again. Because they are content to be religious, to know stuff about God and Jesus, but not confess their sins and be regenerated, they are devoid of the Holy Spirit. Where there is no ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, there is no real understanding the Bible. When biblical understanding is absent, God is silent. Most people who are without Holy Spirit leading and convicting really don’t care to try to read the Bible in the first place. It seems like a waste of time.

Such is the nature of a famine of God’s Word. While a famine of food will only kill you physically, a famine of God’s Word will kill you spiritually. People are resurrected from spiritual death only by the life-giving miracle of Holy Spirit regeneration. To that end, our text will address these questions: “Why don’t I have a desire to read the Bible?” And “Why is it that when I try to read the Bible, it is an exercise in futility, a major waste of time?”

### Our Privilege Through the Holy Spirit (vv.12-13).

Our great and defining privilege is that we have received the Spirit from God. *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God* (v.12). The antithesis to this great

blessing simply enhances the blessing. We have not received the spirit of the world.

From this simple truth we draw a very important conclusion. There are two spirits at work in the world. First, there is the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity. Because He is a member of the Godhead, He was present at Creation. He has continued and will continue to be present throughout all human history and eternity because He is eternal God. His activity is traceable throughout the entire Bible. We have received Him.

But then there is also the spirit of the world which we have not received. This is not only an actual spirit being, but an attitude, ideology, character that is manifested in thinking and activity that is opposed to God's Spirit. This spirit is the essence of Lucifer, Satan, the devil who God created as the chief of the spirit beings (angels). Through pride the chief angel fell into sin, became the arch-adversary of God, and through deception attempts to turn every created being against God our Creator. Satan is the father of and overseer of all evil spirits and what can be called the spirit of this world.

Throughout the Bible the spirit of this world is identified in ways like, the *Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience* – (Ephesians 2:2). He is *the ruler of this world* who initiated the crucifixion of Christ (John 14:30). *The whole world lies in the power of the evil one* (1 John 5:19). *We wrestle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12). *This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already* (1 John 4:3).

Everyone is owned by, ruled by, influenced by one or the other spirit. Each of us is either of the Holy Spirit or of the spirit of this world. No one can be part of one while at the same time being part of the other. It is possible to be of the Holy Spirit, but temporarily act like you are of the spirit of this world. In time, our choices will prove beyond doubt which spirit we have.

The good news for Christians is that we have received the Holy Spirit. We have not received the spirit of the world, *but the Spirit who is from God* (v.12). The plural pronoun “we” refers to the Christians

in Corinth, Paul, Silas, Timothy (whoever was on the evangelistic team) and all of us who follow Christ. We follow Christ because of the Holy Spirit's work of salvation in us. Jesus's promise to the disciples effects every believer in the age that followed. He said, “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*” (John 14:26).

A sinner becomes aware of his or her sin, is able and desires to confess that sin, by faith embraces Christ's work of redemption, because of the Holy Spirit's work in the heart. At the moment the Holy Spirit gives us new life, He takes up permanent residence within us. God sent, gave us the Holy Spirit, and we received Him to our life-long benefit and eternal benefit. Because we have received the third person of the Trinity, because He is dwelling within us, we have the benefit of reading and understanding the Bible.

Because of the Holy Spirit's ministry in us, we understand what God said. We have received the Spirit who is from God *that we might understand the things freely given us by God* (v.12b). The object, what we understand, is *the things God has freely given us*. On one hand, it is true that God has freely given us everything we can possibly imagine. James taught us that *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change* (James 1:17). Solomon was exactly right when he prayed at the dedication of the temple, “*But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you*” (1Chronicles 29:14). The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand that all things are gifts from God.

But on the other hand, the things God has freely given in this case are more specifically identified as “*words taught by the Holy Spirit, . . . spiritual truths*” (v.13). This has to be a reference to the Word of God, the Bible. The result of the Holy Spirit working in us is that we understand these things. Remember Jesus's promise that when the Holy Spirit came, “*He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*” (John 14:26b).

To understand is to know. This is the same, very common word for know (*oida*) that we saw last week in our study in 1 Thessalonians. It means to come to know by experience or just to

know intuitively. In short, the Holy Spirit's ministry is to cause the people He indwells to just know what the Bible says and means. The Greek syntax for this word teaches us that the Holy Spirit brought this ability to understand with Him when He came to indwell us and it has continuing effects in us for life. This is not knowledge reserved for the select few, the initiated, the clergy, the seminary trained (many of whom do not have the Spirit and do not know what the Bible says). This is a huge difference between a saved person and an unsaved person.

As a result of knowing the things God has freely given, we teach what God said. This teaching also is accomplished only with Holy Spirit wisdom. *And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit (v.13a)*. We impart what? The object, the word *this* refers to the things God has freely given, that is, the Bible. They are words not taught by human wisdom. The Bible is words taught by the Holy Spirit. Again Peter made that point very clear when he wrote, *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21)*. Jesus also taught that *God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets (Luke 1:70)*. We know that *all Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16)*. And David declared, *"The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2)*.

Paul and all God-ordained teachers *impart* these things by the Spirit. The word *impart* simply means to speak or tell. Sometimes the telling is by teaching, sometimes by preaching, sometimes just conversation.

In the process of imparting spiritual truths, Holy Spirit filled messengers are interpreting Holy Spirit truths. As Paul put it, we are *interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual (v.13b)*. To interpret is to explain, to make clear. The word typically speaks of an investigative process "to unite, compare, evaluate, and measure the evidence." This is the same idea that Paul taught Timothy regarding his handling of the Word of God. *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)*.

Right handling of the word of truth is being able to cut is right or better, the word was often used to describe the building of a road.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to build the road of Scripture for those who are spiritual (i.e. indwelt by the Holy Spirit). Therefore, interpreting Holy Spirit truths is not at all the same as Therapeutic Moralism, the "feel good about yourself" message imparted to the religious masses by religiously trained communicators. Rather, unfolding the spiritual truths of Scripture to Spirit indwelt people results in them being more conformed to the Holy Spirit's character. Conversely, trying to build a road of Scripture for the non-Spirit filled person is an exercise in futility. They will not understand it nor appreciate it.

Therefore, we must conclude that the Therapeutic Moralism methodology is so popular because it is so necessary. It is so necessary because . . .

### **The "Spirit-less" Person's Disadvantage (v.14).**

At this point in the text, we come to the great divide between the people of the Holy Spirit and the people of the spirit of this world. The natural person rejects Holy Spirit things. *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God (v.14a)*. What is the natural person? This is the person who is still in the natural condition of birth, that is still in sin. This person is *dead in the trespasses and sins in which they walk, following the course of this world, (Ephesians 2:1-2)*. This person is conformed to this world's system, ideology which is opposed to God. *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15b)*. James warned, *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4)*. That is the description of the vast majority of the citizens of the world throughout history. They are the "normal" people, the people "acceptable" to their peers.

But, while the natural people readily accept each other, they do not accept God's Word. *The things of the Spirit of God* are the things freely given by God (v.12); the words taught by the Holy Spirit (v.13). The natural, sinful, unregenerated person does not accept those words of the Bible. A fruitful comparison shows that to *accept* is very similar to the word *receive* in verse twelve. However, *accept* carries the idea of response, a response to an action. The action is

God freely giving us the Bible through the Holy Spirit and the response of the natural person is the ongoing characteristic of “no thank you.” Why? Why won’t they listen? Why won’t they pay attention or take heed when God has been so gracious to offer the teaching of His eternal Word?

There is good reason why the natural person rejects the Bible. They reject because these things *are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (v.14b)*. Divine truth **cannot** make sense to the unsaved person. Martin Luther said, “Man is like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife—he is like a log or a stone, he is like a lifeless statue which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither senses nor heart—unless he is enlightened, converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.”

Therefore, even the most basic truth of the gospel is a stumbling block to such people. Paul laid down that reality in the beginning words of this letter when he wrote, *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:18-23)*.

That kind of rejection is especially common toward warnings or teaching that make sinful people uncomfortable. Such things will be rejected out of hand. And when God gives a warning about the consequences of sin, it is often met with a declared war against God.

The whole problem boils down to the fact that apart from the Holy Spirit, divine truth is indiscernible. *The natural person is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (v.14b)*. Because hearing and understanding the Bible is a work of the Holy Spirit, three conditions preclude a person from really knowing what the Bible teaches. These are spiritual issues which are not necessarily a problem when a person is temporarily distracted by

circumstances, or struggles with mental deficiencies, or by nature has difficulty comprehending reading material.

First, a person cannot understand the Bible when he or she is devoid of the Holy Spirit, which means the person is unsaved. Second, even a born again believer cannot understand the Bible if he or she is quenching the Holy Spirit. That is the very unwise response of a true believer choosing not to listen to God as He is speaking through His Word. Third, a similar case to quenching is grieving the Holy Spirit, which happens when the person indwelt by the Holy Spirit refuses to listen to His prompting through the Bible.

On one hand, grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit will cause a person to appear to be natural, that is sinning against God. On the other hand, the natural person will always and forever not understand the Bible. The Christian who quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit will also be unable to receive Bible teaching.

### **The Result of the Difference (vv.15-16).**

Again there is a two-fold contrasting conclusion about receiving and not receiving God’s Word. It has to do with the ability to judge. First, consider the issue of judgment and the spiritual person. *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one (v.15)*. According to this statement, we who are born again judge all things. This truth must be taken within the context of the text 2:12-14 which teaches the doctrine of “illumination.” Illumination speaks of the Holy Spirit’s work of teaching us the Word of God. We are able to understand, comprehend the truth of God because the Holy Spirit opens our heart to it.

Because the Holy Spirit illumines us, we are able to come to right conclusions or judgments about God’s Word. The word *judgment* speaks of coming to the right conclusion based on investigation. The Bible touches every aspect of life. Spiritual people who are illumined by the Holy Spirit should be able to come to conclusions about matters of life that fit with God’s character. Solomon’s introduction to the collection of wisdom sayings makes that claim. The purpose of God’s wisdom is *To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence*

*to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth – Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance (Proverbs 1:2-5).*

Therefore, because we are potentially able to judge all things, we are judged by no one. *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one (v.15).* Because the unspiritual person cannot comprehend the Bible, he cannot rightly judge a believer. They can and do express a lot of opinions. They do judge by human wisdom. They do measure you by current trends, fads, or political correctness.

But the person devoid of Holy Spirit illumination cannot correctly analyze, scrutinize, investigate, or draw a right conclusion according to God's Word. Most basically, in their thinking, if there is a God, He has no say in current events or in the life of the one passing judgment. That mind or attitude cannot even begin to rightly assess a life lived for the glory of Christ.

In contrast, the believer passes judgment on issues with the mind of Christ. God is the standard of instruction. *“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” (v.16a).* The answer to that question is that no person is born with the capacity to understand God and especially no ability or authority to instruct God. God sets the standard of righteousness and His Word explains and defines that standard.

Yes, that is true. Therefore, the person who *has the mind of Christ (v.16b)* judges with Christ's mind. *But we have the mind of Christ (v.16b).* We understand the mind (character) of God through the Bible. It is the Holy Spirit's work to continually draw us alongside the standard of God's revealed truth in order to understand Him. Therefore, *the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything – and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you – abide in him (1 John 2:27).*

People who are abiding in Christ are hearing Him speak through His Word. People who reject the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who quench and grieve the Holy Spirit, will not hear Him speak. They will hear a lot of religious ideas, they will even hear and read the words of the Bible. But the Bible cannot speak to them. They are left with and satisfied with false teaching, with therapeutic moralism,

which is a cheap replacement for God's truth. A famine of God's Word is a spiritually deadly condition.