

**1 Corinthians 2:12-3:4**  
**(Ezekiel 36:25-27; Luke 11:9-13)**  
**“But We Have the Mind of Christ”**

## **Introduction**

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ... We have the mind of Christ” (2:12&16). What utterly audacious statements – blasphemous if not completely true. The problem is that most of us do not experience the reality of the Spirit of God as powerfully as we experience the spirit of the world, the spirit of this present age. What is our problem and what can we do about it?

In the opening chapter of this letter, Paul shows the Corinthians that their spiritual pride is a denial of the gospel, for God has chosen the weak things of this world to shame the strong and the foolish things of this world to shame the wise. The gospel appears weak and foolish to those who are perishing, but is the power of God to those who are being saved.

Why is this? Why does the gospel seem foolish until it has had its way and done its work in us? And why are most of us still living like the world around us when the Scriptures invite us to make such tremendous claims as these: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ... But we have the mind of Christ”?

In order to understand what Paul is saying here, we must understand the meaning of the terms that he uses, and how they relate to a biblical view of what it means to be human: that is, how God created us to relate to him and to the world around us, how we have changed from that original design, and how God uses the gospel to restore us to intimate fellowship with him. Only then will we begin to understand why it is that most realize so little of God’s promise to make us, not merely better than we once were, but entirely new.

## **Body**

### **1. How did God create humans to relate to him?**

Today, most Christian theologians living in the west hold to a view that humans are dichotomous, that is, that we consist of two parts: the immaterial part called either the spirit or the soul, and the material part called the body. However, I hold – along with most Church Fathers through Augustine, and such popular evangelical authors as Andrew Murray, Watchman Nee and James Montgomery Boice, as well as nearly all Eastern Orthodox theologians – to a trichotomous view, that is, that we consist of three parts: the spirit, soul and body. The reason I hold this view over against most of my theological family is that it seems to fit better the plain sense of Scripture.

Four illustrations:

**First**, the creation account of Genesis 2: “Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground [the body] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [the Hebrew says literally, “spirit of life”] and man became a living creature [literally, a “living soul”]”. There you have the three aspects: body, soul and spirit.

**Secondly**, we see this in Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonian Christians: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

**Thirdly**, in Hebrews 4:12, we read: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

And a **fourth** example is the text we are studying this morning in 1 Corinthians 2 & 3, as I hope to show in a few moments.

Now, why is this important? Who cares about biblical anthropology on a lovely late summer Sunday morning? **Here’s the reason I am emphasizing this:** apart from this biblical framework, I don’t think we can fully appreciate what Paul is saying in these verses. God created us as spirit, soul and body, to live in intimacy with him, our spirit in union with his Spirit, and our soul (which is the self, the personality, the self-aware, self-conscious person) taking its direction, its leading, from the spirit and acting on God’s behalf in the world through our body.

## 2. What went wrong?

The essence of the fall was that humanity chose to live from the outside in, the soul taking its direction, not from God’s Spirit, but from the desires of the body – what John described as “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” (1 John 2:16) – thus causing spiritual death and enmity with God.

Our first parents wanted what God had proscribed because it looked beautiful and they thought it would taste delicious and would give them a kind of knowledge that God had kept from them. In other words, it promised them autonomy, life apart from God, the opportunity to take or reject what was around them – to be their own lord and master. And in that act of rebellion they separated themselves from the source of life, died spiritually and began to die physically.

## 3. How does God rescue and restore?

In salvation, God not only forgives us through the cross of Christ, breaks once and for all the curse of sin and the power of death, but he also gives us spiritual life – and thus eternal life – by giving us his Spirit and bringing our spirit to life. We now are called to begin living again as God created us to live, in intimate communion with

him, our soul directed by the spirit, our body a servant rather than a master: Life lived from the inside out.

#### 4. If we have been brought back to spiritual life, what is our problem?

And so we come at last to our text, where Paul describes three kinds of people, each dominated by either their spirit or soul or body:

**First**, the *psukikos* or “natural person” (2:14): Here Paul describes a person without the Spirit of God, living out of his soul, his natural intelligence and strength, the best that humanity can offer apart from God’s grace. In this state, we cannot understand the gospel of grace, the cross of Christ seems foolish and weak, and we are prey to religions and spiritualities that feed our pride and keep us from God’s radical grace.

**Second**, the *pneumatikos* or “spiritual person” (2:15): Here, Paul has in view a person who has been born of the Spirit, who has received the Spirit of God, who has been restored to fellowship with God and has the capacity now, and thus the opportunity, to know the wisdom and power of God through the victory of the crucified Messiah.

**Finally**, the *sarkinos* or “fleshly person” (3:1): Here, Paul envisions the heart of the problem in Corinth: a person who has received the Spirit of God, but is living as though he had not. *I would suggest that this is our problem! This describes the American church as well the church in Corinth.* Paul is appalled at this and creates an entirely new category of description, not as a third alternative, but to shame the Corinthians. And we should share their shame.

Note that Paul is **not** suggesting that carnal (or fleshly) Christianity is an alternative for those who are satisfied simply to truck along at a low level of intimacy with God in Christ. Please don’t miss the fact that he is using this description precisely to shame his readers. Remaining a baby rather than growing up is not an option for a human being. Nor is it an option for a Christian.

#### 5. So how do we start experiencing this gift of intimacy with God?

Throughout his letters, Paul’s appeal to Christians is always, “Be what you are! Start living out of who you now are as a member of Christ’s body in whom God’s Spirit now dwells. It begins by knowing what Paul calls the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” which “God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (2:7&10), wisdom deeper than the mind alone can grasp. We need to engage God’s truth, God’s wisdom, as personal knowledge of the heart, truth to which we have committed ourselves, entrusted ourselves, truth that is beginning consciously and intentionally to shape our view of the world. Paul puts it like this: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ... We have the mind of Christ” (2:12,16).

Until we know this, until God's own Spirit brings this home to the center of our being, we will continue to live from the outside in, seeking even to know the Lord through the senses. This requires practicing the presence of the Lord: in prayer that is more than merely saying prayers, in Bible reading that more than merely studying passages to extract propositions, in loving service that expands our capacity to know and love God as we know, love and serve those whom he has entrusted to us.

What the gospel offers us is the restoration of intimate communion with the living God. What we are to seek is the realization, the actualization, the fulfillment, of that promise. We are *not* born again as fully mature men and women in Christ. We are born as babies, but we must not stay babies. Just as we must move from milk to cereal to meat, just as we must grow from being held to crawling to walking to running, so too we must grow up spiritually into people who can eat the strong meat of God's truth, who can walk with God and run the race set before us, who can bring the new life of the gospel to others, and care for them, nurture them, help them to maturity.

This is what the Scriptures see as the normal Christian life. It is the only fully human life we can live, because our great God and Father made us for this, Christ suffered and died to redeem us for this, and the Spirit has been given so that we might live this new life to the full.

## **Conclusion**

So, what of you? Do you want this? Do you long for this? Or will you keep looking out there at the world around you to satisfy what only God himself can satisfy? This world apart from Christ has never fully satisfied you and never will, because it cannot deliver what it promises, except in and through Christ, who suffered and died to redeem us along with the world (John 3:16: "For God so loved the *cosmos*"). You were made for something infinitely better. "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ... But we have the mind of Christ" (2:12&16).