

## NATURAL OR SPIRITUAL?

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A SERMON

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*“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,  
neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

*1 Corinthians 2:14*

THE apostle Paul knows of only two classes of men—natural and spiritual. Before his eyes all other distinctions are extinguished. Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, male or female, circumcision or uncircumcision—all these varieties among men are mere accidents in his esteem. He does not stay to divide men according to the symptoms of their nature.

They may be devout men, such as make a profession of godliness, men of morality, men who have commenced sin, or men who have become adept in it. He knows better than merely to judge men by their symptoms. He takes either their diseased state or their healthy state, and so divides them. He lays the axe at the root of the tree, and doing so, he perceives only two classes of men—the natural and the spiritual.

Under the term “natural,” the apostle includes all those persons who are not partakers of the Spirit of God. It matters not how excellent, how estimable, how intelligent, how instructed they may be. If the Spirit of God has not given to them a new and higher nature than they ever possessed by their creature birth, he puts them all down at once in the list of natural men. They are what they are by nature. They never professed to have received the Spirit of God. He puts them down, therefore, as natural men.

On the other hand, all into whom the Spirit of God has come, breathing into them a new and diviner life, he puts down under the other head of spiritual men. They may be as yet but babes in grace. Their faith may be weak. Their love may be but in its early bud. As yet their spiritual senses may be little exercised, perhaps their faults may be in excess of their virtues, but inasmuch as the root of the matter is in them, and they have passed from death unto life, out of the region of nature into that which is beyond nature—the kingdom of grace—he puts them down also, all of them in one list, as spiritual men.

And then he goes on to affirm concerning natural men—those who are not partakers of the Spirit—that the truths of God, which are spiritual, they do not and cannot receive. He teaches that it is utterly impossible that they ever should receive them, unless lifted out of that class of natural men and transformed by the Spirit’s work into spiritual men.

This change, however, being effected, they will not only receive the things of the Spirit, but embrace them with delight, feed upon them with intense satisfaction, and eventually rise into that state of glory which is next beyond the state of grace.

This morning, I propose—and O that God the Holy Spirit may bear witness in our hearts!—I propose, first of all, to dwell a little while upon the great truth that *natural men do not receive the things of the Spirit of God, but count them foolishness*. In the second place, I shall show, for a moment only, that *the reason of the rejection of the things of God cannot be because they are really foolish, for they are not so*. Thirdly, we shall come to the inference that *the reason why the natural man rejects the things of God, is to be found in himself alone*. And then, fourthly, we shall consider *the practical lessons which the whole subject teaches*.

**I.** First, then, it is a well-known fact, and one which can be proved by everyday observation of every day, that THE NATURAL MAN RECEIVES NOT THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

Mark, we lay this down as a rule. We do not say that the drunken or debauched natural man receives not the things of God. That is true, but we also insist upon it that the delicate and the refined natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. I do not pick out some one case, and say the uneducated, illiterate, coarse, low-minded natural man cannot comprehend spiritual things—but all alike—the most intelligent, enlightened, and trained natural men—equally, do not, and cannot, and will not comprehend the things of the Spirit of God.

Like our apostle, we take a wide range and do not leave out one. However amiable in natural temperament, however well-trained by the best parental associations, however kept in check by the most excellent position in providence, however patriotic, however self-denying, however benevolent, however estimable in all other respects—the natural man does not and cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God.

Now, look around and search for the facts which prove the truth of this. How many natural men are there, and such as you would call good men too, in some ways, who *violently oppose* the things of the Spirit of God. They do not believe them. Nay, they say they are a lie. They cannot understand how men should be simpletons enough to believe such ridiculous things.

Honestly do they imagine that they shall be snapping the chains of priestcraft and unriveting the fetters of superstition, if they should come forward and attempt to prove that these spiritual things are a mere delusion.

There, gentlemen, we have lived to see you, under a profession of religion, actually oppose those spiritual things which this religion teaches. We have lived to see what we scarcely ever dreamed to be possible—clergymen of the Church of England themselves denying the truths which they swore they would defend, and in their “Essays and Reviews” seeking to cast down those spiritual things which once they professed to have understood when they claimed to have received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of their bishop.

We have not only in these times opened and avowed infidel lecturers who, like honest men, deny everything openly, but we have the hypocritical Christian infidel who, like a dishonest thief and wolf in sheep’s clothing, willing always to take the gain of godliness, denies godliness itself. Perhaps it was left for this age to permit wickedness to culminate to the highest, and to see the growth of the vilest hypocrisy that ever appeared among the sons of men.

We have had abundant proof that men of the most scientific minds—persons who have been exceedingly inquiring, men who have trod the realms of knowledge, and gone even to the seventh heaven of wisdom—that these have, nevertheless, proved that they could not receive the things of the kingdom of God by their determined opposition and enmity against anything like the truth as it is in Jesus.

When you hear them blaspheming the holy name of Christ, when you hear them bringing what they call “scientific facts” against the truth of revelation, be not amazed as though it were some new thing, but write this down in your memorandum book—the Holy Ghost said of old—“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,” and these men live to prove that what the Spirit of God said was very truth.

A greater proportion of persons there are who do not so much oppose violently as more secretly despise and condemn. Well, they tell us, they dare say that the Christian religion is a very good thing for some people, and especially for old women, and for persons who are on the borders of the grave. But still no rational being would fully endorse for a moment the doctrines of the Gospel, and especially that particular form of them which John Calvin taught.

For if there be any doctrines that excite more the spleen of these wise men than any other, it is the doctrines of grace—the doctrine of discriminating, distinguishing love, the doctrine of divine sovereignty, the doctrine of God’s being really God, and not man. Against these, they have no words too bitter.

“Oh,” they say, “it is an exploded theory. It has had its day and it has become effete.” And so, without actually persecuting those who hold the truth, or without even setting themselves up by active efforts to put it down—they do secretly, with a sneer and with a jest, pass it by as a thing utterly unworthy of a rational person, a thing that is not for a moment to be thought of as being one-half so important as the wing of a beetle, or as the particular flight of a sparrow, or the period of the migration of a swallow.

All the facts of natural history they think valuable and important, but these grander truths which have to do with the kingdom of God, they despise utterly and think they are but the dream of simpletons. Again, I say, my brethren, marvel not at this. Let this be to you another argument that the Spirit of God knew what was in man, and rightly judged of the human heart when He said, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.”

Probably in this assembly there are very few of either of these two classes, but a far more numerous company now claims our attention. The great mass of mankind says, “We dare say it is all well, and good, and true, and it is a proper thing for ministers to think about, and the deacons of churches, and so on. No doubt they should see to it—it is very proper that there should be a right creed and that the articles of the church should be defended. And of course, the Bible Society should spread the Bible. But then, of course, nobody ought to be importuned to read it—it is of no particular importance.”

Better read the almanac than read the Bible, according to some, and as to the doctrines, “Oh,” they say—

*“For forms of faith let graceless zealots fight,  
He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.”*

“O yes, no doubt,” they say, when they see some zealous brother vindicating a truth, “you are all right and so is your friend who believes the very reverse. You are both right as far as you go, and as far as I am concerned, I should never interfere with you, for I do not consider the things to be worth the turning of a hair. I never trouble my head at all about it.

“I have so much to do with the rise and fall of stocks in the market, of attending to my cattle, or seeing after my shop, that it would not do for me to attempt to be a theologian. The Bible is an excellent book. I have nothing to say against that, certainly. But at the same time, for a farmer, a book on practical chemistry is more useful, and no doubt, for a person who holds some office in the parish, he had better buy a handy book of common law than a book on the law of God.”

I only just give you a sketch of what many say and of what many more think. I know there are many of you here present today who say, “O yes, it is a good thing for us to go somewhere on Sunday—we do not think the Sabbath should be broken. We like to hear a minister, and we like to see him in earnest—but it is of no importance to us—it is not a matter of concern to us.”

Ah! sirs, you, too have proven that, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.” These things which are so important, that you should neglect everything else to attend to them, are by you thought folly. These eternal realities, compared with which the world’s highest interests are but as unsubstantial shadows, you pass by as being idle dreams, and doubtless they *are* dreams to you, because you, still being in your natural estate, do not, cannot, will not, receive the things of the Spirit of God.

We are not without those persons, also, who even go farther. They say, “Well these things are of no importance to *me*,” and they think that those are fools who feel that there is any importance in them to them *personally*. “Oh!” says one, “for a man to sit down and think on the doctrine of election, and believe himself to be elect—why the man must be of a very debased intellect.”

“Oh,” says another, “to be always meditating upon the atonement of Christ—why there are other themes more expansive to the mind than this.” “Ay,” says a third, “to be turning over a mere system of

divinity, and professing to be able to revel in certain mysterious truths—such persons must be of a weak mind, or else very fanatical or enthusiastic.”

And so you will often hear persons say, if a man be a little more earnest than usual, “Surely that man is going wild. Certainly he is attaching an undue importance to these matters.” They will put him down as a Sectarian, perhaps, which is one of the most honorable names by which a true Christian is known in these times.

“Ah!” they will say, “a zealot! a bigot!” because a man happens to be honest in what he professes to believe, and thinks that if religion be anything, it ought to be everything, and if it be worth one thought, it is worth all our thoughts, that if it has any truth in it, it ought to be the master and ruler of all other truths, and governor of all the thoughts and the acts of life.

Now, Christian men and women, when you see any who turn upon their heel and despise you, because with earnestness you would seek the Lord your God, and strive to honor Him, think it not some new display of human depravity. Think not that you have made a fresh discovery in the awful deep of human departure from God. But say, rather, now again, “I know, and once more am I confirmed in the fact, that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.”

It is a great wonder that there is one Christian upon the face of the earth. Some religions teach doctrines palatable to human nature, but the doctrines of Christ are the most unpalatable that could have been suggested. Some religions find that in nature which echoes to their voice, but Christ comes and brings a sword upon the earth to slay the fondest darlings of our fancy, and put to death the most proud favorites of our ambition.

Oh! had the religion of Christ taught us that man was a noble being, only a little fallen—had the religion of Christ taught that Christ had taken away by His blood, sin from every man, and that every man by his own free will, without divine grace, might be saved—it were indeed a most acceptable religion to the mass of men. It would just suit their taste. And as the ox drinks down water, so would they drink it down.

But such a religion as that of Christ, so diametrically opposed as it is to all the evil propensities of man, owes its very existence to the might of God, that it has not long ago died from the earth, through the decease of its last admirer, is only due to that supreme power of the Holy Spirit which goes with the preaching of the Gospel wherever Christ is faithfully lifted up.

**II.** Now, briefly on my second point—THE NATURAL MAN COUNTS THE THINGS OF GOD TO BE FOOLISH, but there is nothing whatever in the things themselves to justify such an estimation.

Sir, you do not know what you say when you declare that the Gospel of Christ is absurd. I am certain you do not understand it and that you are talking of something you have never studied. You are generally pretty safe with a man who rails at the Bible, by saying, “Did you ever read it?”

You are not often wrong, when you hear a minister of Christ found fault with, by saying to the man, “Did you ever hear him? Did you ever read his sermons?” In nine cases out of ten, it is, “No, I do not know anything about him, yet I do not like him. I do not know anything about Christ, but I do not like Him. I do not know anything about His doctrines, but I do not wish to know.”

I have heard persons rail at Calvinistic doctrine, who never in their lives have read a word that Calvin wrote. If you were to offer them a small treatise in which that noble system of divinity should be vindicated, they would say, “Oh! it is no doubt so dry, I should not be able to read it.” Yet these learned gentlemen know what is inside a book without opening it!

They are like some critics of whom I have heard who, when they meet with a new volume, take the knife and cut the first page, smell it, and then condemn or praise. Many there are who do just the same with the Bible. They have heard some verses of it once or twice, they have got some idea of it, and straightway they are wise. They take to themselves their own degree of Doctor of Divinity, and they have much boldness in their unbelief.

Now, of any man who should denounce the system of truth which is taught in Scripture as ridiculous and foolish, I can only say he has never taken the trouble to search it out for himself. Have not the

mightiest intellects confessed that the truths of this Book were infinitely above their highest flights? Even Newton, who could thread the spheres, and map the march of what else had seemed discordant planets, even he said there were depths here which no mortal could fathom.

“O the depths of the wisdom of God!” This has been the exclamation of some of the most glorious minds that have ever enlightened the world. And I can say, and I know it to be a truth, that every man who reads the Word of God and studies the divinity therein revealed—if he at first thinks that he understands it, when he reads again, he finds that he has only begun to know.

And when he shall have searched year after year, and have become more than usually proficient in the study of the things of God, he will still say, “Now I begin to know my folly. Now I began to discover that God is above me and beneath me, but I cannot grasp Him. I cannot find out the Almighty to perfection. His Words, His works, His ways, herein revealed to the sons of men, are past finding out.”

You wise fellows, who turn upon your heels and sneer at things which have astonished minds infinitely vaster than yours, prove your own folly when you call the things of God folly. With regard to that particular form of divine truth which we hold so dear, currently called Calvinistic doctrines—there is no philosophy propounded by any sage so profound as that philosophy.

There are no truths that were ever taught so wonderful, so worthy of the most profound research of the most expanded minds, as those doctrines of the eternal love, the discriminating grace, and the infinite power of God, co-working to produce the results which His wisdom had decreed.

When every other science shall have been exhausted, when astronomy shall have no wonders left, when geology shall have no secrets to unravel, when natural history and philosophy shall have given up all their hidden treasures, there will still remain a mine without a bottom, there will still remain a sea of wisdom without a shore, in the doctrines of the Gospel of the grace of God. The folly, therefore, cannot be in the doctrines themselves.

And as on the one hand, these things of the Spirit of God are wise and profound, so on the other hand, they are most important, and most imperatively necessary to be understood, so that if they be not received, it is not because they are uncongenial with our necessities.

There are some speculations which a man need not enter upon. I receive constantly questions upon speculations which never struck my mind before and certainly never will again. Persons want to know what is the origin of sin. They ask ten thousand questions which, if they could be answered, would not make them a whit the better.

But the things of the Gospel of God, which are as important as life and death depending upon them, men are content to slur over without making any earnest inquiry or setting themselves to ascertain their truth.

O sirs! the doctrines of God teach you your relationship to your Maker—is not that worth understanding? They teach you your condition before the Most High God—should you not know that? Ought you not to have clear ideas of it? They show you how God can be just to man, and yet be gracious—is not that a riddle that is worthy to have an answer?

They reveal to you how you can approach God and become His child. How you may be conformed to His image and made a partaker of His glory—is not that worth understanding? They reveal to you the world to come. They put to your short-sighted eye, a telescope which enables you to pierce the darkness and to see the unseen.

The doctrines of grace put into your hands the keys of heaven, and unveil the secrets of death and hell—are not these things worth grasping? Are not the secrets of these places worth the discovery? The doctrines of grace put inside your hands powers infinitely greater than any wizard was conceived to have wielded when he used his magic rod.

By their might, you can destroy your troubles. You can see your sins swallowed up. You can behold your enemies defeated. You can see death destroyed, the grave swallowed up, and life and immortality brought to light. If you, then, as a natural man, say that the things that are written in this Book are foolish, it is not because they are trivial, unimportant, and despicable—for no man can ever over-

estimate their value, and no soul can solemnly enough weigh them, and understand how important they are. It argues a high excess of impiety, when a man shall say that that which came from God is foolish. Perhaps blasphemy itself cannot outvie that, and yet how many have been guilty of this constructive blasphemy!

Let my finger run around these galleries and along these seats beneath. Are there not many of you who have said the Bible was a dry and uninteresting book? And yet God wrote it! And what have you said? Have you not impugned your Maker? Have you not said, perhaps, that the doctrines of the Gospel were very unimportant? Can you believe that your Maker sat down to write an unimportant Book, or that the Holy Spirit inspired men of old to write that which, if not nonsense, is certainly of no importance whatever?

Come, bow your head and repent of this your grave offence—for an offence it is—since it is not within the compass of any modest reason to imagine that any word which God has written can be foolish, or unimportant, or unworthy to be understood. I suppose it is granted by all who love the Word of God, and to those mainly I must appeal, that the reason why the natural man rejects the doctrines of God is not because they are foolish. Then there must be some other reason.

**III.** Thirdly, I propose to speak of THE REASON FOR THE REJECTION OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL BY NATURAL MEN.

The reasons are to be found in themselves. And what are those reasons? The apostle tells us they cannot receive them, for they are foolishness unto them. I think he means they cannot receive them, first of all, *for want of taste*.

You have sometimes seen a man standing before a splendid picture. It was painted by Raphael, or Rubens, or Titians, and he stands and admires it. “What a noble countenance!” says he, “How well the coloring has been placed! How excellently he understands his lights and shadows! What a fine conception! I could stand a week and admire that splendid picture.”

Some country bumpkin, who is walking through the gallery, hears what our friend the artist is saying, and he says, “I should not like to stand a week and look at it. It looks to me to be an old decayed piece of canvas that wants cleaning. I do not think the world would be much the worse if it should all get cleaned off.”

He walks through the gallery, and notices that on the wall outside there is a great daub—a picture of an elephant standing on its head, and a clown or two performing in some circus, and he says, “That’s beautiful, that’s just my taste.” Now you blame our country friend because he cannot admire that which is really excellent, but finds a great deal more satisfaction in a common daub plastered on the wall.

It would be quite correct to say of him, that he cannot receive the beauties of refinement and taste, because he has never been in any way instructed in the matter. He has a want of taste for such things. Just so is it with the natural man. Give him some work of fiction—a daub upon the wall. Give him some fine piece of imagination, (and what is that when compared with the Word of Him that spake from heaven?) and he is satisfied.

But before the Book of God, before the revelation of the Most High, of the All-Wise, he stands and he sees nothing, nothing to admire, nothing to enchant his heart, nothing to kindle his imagination, nothing to enlist his faith, nothing to arouse his powers, nothing to excite his hopes. Surely there is a sad want of taste here, and the natural man, for want of a taste for such things, loves not the things of God.

But it is not merely for want of taste, it is for *want of organs* by which to appreciate the thing. Here is a blind man, and we have taken him upon a pilgrimage to the summit of a mountain. What a landscape, my friend. What a landscape! What do you think of it? “Not much,” says he.

Why, look at those lakes there melting into one! Do you not see the mountain yonder across the valley? What a variety of colors upon its sides! Did you ever see such a blending of colors as that which is here produced by the Great Artist? And there, cannot you see yonder clouds, how nobly they sail along? Look downward. What a pleasant sight is that village which seems to have diminished till it looks like a few children’s toys put together there in sport!

And now turn yonder and see that winding river like a thread of silver going through the emerald fields—what a magnificent view! What do you think of it, my friend? “I do not think much of it,” says he. You are astonished. At last you say, “Well, if you do not think something of this, you must be blind.” “That is just what I am,” says he, “and of course I do not think much of this when I am blind.”

Now the natural man is blind. The eye of the Christian is his faith. But the natural man, being destitute of a living faith in our living Savior, is like a man without eyes. He says it is foolish. It is nothing to him. Do you think you could get a blind man to count down hundreds of pounds for a single picture? It is of no use to him.

What would a deaf man give to go where you hear the sweetest singing that ever trilled from human lips? “Oh! no,” thinks he, “it is foolish.” He can hardly understand why men should spend their money and give the time to listen to the numerous combinations of sound produced by a Handel. Or if blind, he cannot comprehend why men should build long galleries, and hang their fortunes out in pictures, or why they should travel to the Alps, or wish to cross the sea to view the mighty wonders of other lands.

“No,” says he, “it is foolish and trivial—better to stay at home. There is nothing in it.” So is it with the natural man. He lacks the organs. He has no ear of faith, no eye of faith, and he cannot, therefore, receive the things of God. They are foolishness to him.

But more than this—not only does he lack taste and lack organs, *but he actually lacks the nature which could appreciate these things*. I will tell you a fable. There was a certain swine exceedingly learned among its class. It had studied the flavor of all manners of seeds, and fruits, and acorns, and knew right well, by long calculations and experience, the right time when the trough would be full, and when it would be time for it to come forth from its resting place.

Greatly respected was this aged swine and considered by its fellows to be one of the great dignitaries of the sty. And one day, it enlightened its fellows by a speech to this effect—“I saw,” said he, “the other night, by the light of the moon, a man—poor simple man he was, looking through a long tube at the stars. Now, I thought within myself that surely he was mad. If he had been scraping up acorns, there would have been some common sense in it. If he had been getting together husks, why there would have been something practical in it.

“But for a man with two feet and two hands, to be letting them be still, and only using his eyes to look up at the stars—ah! he must be a fanatic and an enthusiast. He is not as sensible and practical as you and I are, who are content as long as we get our barley meal regularly, and can creep back and lie down again in our straw.” And all his audience grunted their approbation. They said at once that this human being was far inferior to the swine in the matter of practical wisdom.

Do not smile, perhaps you belong to these gentry yourselves. I heard a human swine say the other day—mark, a human swine—it was one who sometimes could look through a telescope, and this human swine said, “Ah! there you are! You are going to your chapel on Thursday night, and to your prayer meeting on Monday, and you spend hours in praying and reading your Bible. It is fanaticism. Now, I am the man for common sense. I stick to my business, I do. I say, ‘Leave these things to take care of themselves.’ I am looking out for the present. I am practical, I am.”

And those that were by, grunted their approval, like human swine, as they were, and if a really spiritual man had been present, he would not have wondered, but he would have said, “Every being to its taste. These are natural men and they set up their own nature. It is a swinish nature and they act up to their swinish spirit.” He would not have been angry with them, but he would have pitied them.

Poor things, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” “What a degrading simile!” says one. It is, sir, but not more degrading than human nature is. “Why you make us out to be inferior to Christians, then!” Of course you are. As much as the brute is inferior to a man, so is a mere natural man inferior to a spiritually-minded man, because we rise by three steps of the ladder.

There is the animal, he lacks intellect. God gives intellect, and there comes the man. God gives His Spirit, and then comes the Christian. But the Christian is a higher and nobler creature than the mere offspring of Adam. Just as much as the second Adam, who is the Lord from heaven, exceeds the first

Adam, who was but made of the dust of the earth, so do the seed of the second Adam exceed all the offspring of the first Adam—rising to a higher life, to greater dignities, and to a nobler destiny than they.

**IV.** And now, lastly, I come to THE PRACTICAL TRUTHS WHICH FLOW FROM THIS GREAT THOUGH SORROWFUL FACT.

Do you not perceive, men and brethren, that if what I have stated be true, there is *absolute necessity for regeneration, or the work of the Spirit?* An absolute necessity, I say, because in no one single instance can it be dispensed with. You may educate a nature till it should attain the highest point, but you cannot educate an old nature into a new one.

You may educate a horse, but you cannot educate it into a man. You shall train the bird that sits upon your finger, but you cannot train a linnet into an eagle—nor is it possible for you to train by the best instruction the natural man into a spiritual man. Between the two there is still a great gulf fixed.

But cannot the natural man, by great efforts long-continued, at last come to be spiritual? No, he cannot. Let the fish in the water wish as much as ever it likes, and despite Dr. Darwin's hypothesis, I aver that no pike by all its wishing ever wished itself into an ostrich, and that no single minnow was ever known to make itself into a lark. It may get as high as its own nature can get it, but not beyond. It is a transformation which only the Divine Being can effect.

So you may by your own efforts make yourselves the best of natural men. You may become the most patriotic of statesmen, you may become the most sober and discreet of moralists, you may become the kindest and most benevolent of philanthropists, but into a spiritual man you cannot bring yourself. Do what you will, and still at your very best there is a division as wide as eternity between you and the regenerate man.

But cannot another man help us out of such a nature into a state of grace? No, by no means. As man is powerless for himself, so is he powerless for his fellow. The priest may dip his pretentious fingers into the water which he professes to have sanctified, and may put the drops upon the infant's brow, but that the child is regenerate is a lie.

He may take the child in after-life into the baptismal pool if he will, and there bury him agreeably to the apostle's metaphor, but that by immersion, any more than by sprinkling, a soul can be regenerate is a gross and infamous lie. He may put his hand upon his head and bless him in God's name, he may perform divers enchantments over him, and conclude at last with the final sacred greasing, and dispatch his spirit with extreme unction into another world—but to regenerate another man is as impossible to our fellow men as to create a world, or to make another heaven, and rival the majesty of Deity.

How, then, is it to be done? The Spirit of God alone can do it. O sirs! this is a great mystery, but you must know it if you would be saved. It is a solemn secret, but it is one which must be known in your consciences, or else shut out from heaven you must be.

The Spirit of God must new make you—you must be born-again. "If a man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." The same power which raised Christ Jesus from the dead must be exerted in raising us from the dead. The very same omnipotence, without which angels or worms could not have had a being, must again step forth out of its privy-chamber, and do as great a work as it did at the first creation in making us anew in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There have been attempts at all times to get rid of this unpleasant necessity. Constantly the Christian church itself tries to forget it, but as often as ever this old doctrine of regeneration is brought forward pointedly, God is pleased to favor His church with a revival. The doctrine which looks at first as though it would hush every exertion with indolence, and make men sit down with listlessness and despair, is really like the trumpet of God to awake the dead.

And where it is fully and faithfully preached, though it grates upon the carnal ear, though it excite enmity in many against the man who dares to proclaim it, yet it is owned of God. Because it honors God, God will honor it. This was the staple preaching of Whitefield, and it was by the preaching of this



that he was made as the mighty angel flying through the midst of heaven preaching the everlasting Gospel to every creature.

He was always great upon that which he called the great R—Regeneration. Whenever you heard him, the three Rs came out clearly—Ruin, Regeneration, and Redemption! Man ruined, wholly ruined, hopelessly, helplessly, eternally ruined! Man regenerated by the Spirit of God, and by the Spirit of God alone wholly made a new creature in Christ! Man redeemed, redeemed by precious blood from all his sins, not by works of righteousness, not by deeds of the law, not by ceremonies, prayers, or resolutions, but by the precious blood of Christ.

Oh! we must be very pointed, and very plain about regeneration, for this is the very pith and marrow of the matter—“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Another practical inference. If you and I, or any of us, have received the things of the Spirit of God, we ought to look upon that as comfortable evidence that we have been born again. What do you say, my hearer? Does your faith lay her hand this morning upon the head of Christ, and take Him to be your Savior, your teacher, and your all? If so, blessed are you, for flesh and blood have not revealed this unto you.

Or does your spirit this morning not only agree to the truth of divine election, of assured Redemption, and of the finished work and immutable love of Christ, but do you love the truth in your heart as well as agree to it in the head? If so, the natural man receiveth not these things, therefore, you are no natural man, but the Spirit of God has brought you into His kingdom, because He has enabled you to receive His truth.

Precious is faith indeed, because it assuredly evidences to us what is beyond the reach of our senses. You can't tell whether you are born again or not except by your faith. There will be no difference in your face, there will be no difference in your flesh, nor even in your mental characteristics. You may remain to a great extent the same man as far as mind and body are concerned.

But faith—that which was not there before—faith is the grand symptom which betokens returning health. It is the flag hung out upon the castle of the soul, showing that the King is the secret tenant in the stateroom of the soul. It is the light which shows that the sun has risen. It is the morning star which heralds the full illumination and meridian sunlight of eternal glory. Prize your faith, ask for more of it, but look upon it as being an evidence that you have passed from death unto life.

And lastly, my dear hearers, how this text shows you the necessity of accompanying all your efforts to do good with earnest prayer to God! “Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon.” When we first begin to preach, we think that the doctrines that are so sweet to us will be sure to be sweet to other people. And when persons begin to abuse and find fault, we are so astonished. Oh! if we had begun to learn the truth a little better, we should not be astonished at all, except when any receive the truth, for that we should always think to be the greatest miracle of all.

You have been trying to teach your child, and it is not converted yet. Ah! don't marvel, but take your child in the arms of your prayer to the Spirit of God, and say, “O Lord, I cannot put the truth into this child, for it cannot receive it. Do You renew its heart, and then it shall receive the truth indeed!”

And specially may I ask your continued and earnest prayers for me. What is the minister of Christ to do? He has to speak to a mountain and bid it be removed. Can his words remove it? He has to speak to fire, and bid it change its nature into water. He has to speak to the dead, and say, “Ye dry bones, live!” Is not his ministry a foolish and a futile thing unless the Spirit of God be with him?

I pray you, then, be instant in your prayers to God. Strive earnestly at the throne of grace for all the ministers of the New Testament—that power may be bestowed upon them—for we are better at home than here, if the Spirit of God be not with us. In vain, O you unbelievers, you sound your trumpets! In vain, O you Gideons, you break your pitchers that the light may shine! In vain, you Jonahs, you cry through the midst of the wretched city! In vain, you Peters, you preach even to peoples of many nations!

If the Spirit come not down from on high like tongues of fire, if God send not life, and energy, and light with the Word—you shall go back without your sheaves—you shall return without success, wearied by disappointment, damaged by fear, and ready to lay down and die.

But oh! if you come forth, O Spirit of God! there is not a preacher in the corner of the streets who shall not win his souls. There is not a minister today in the humblest conventicle, in the lowest of back streets, who shall not be made like Peter on the Pentecostal day. There is not one feeble man or woman teaching children in the Sabbath school who shall not become a winner of souls when the Spirit of God is with him!

Of all that I have taught this morning, this is the sum—Man is dead in sin and life is a gift of God. You who have received it should plead with God that that gift should be bestowed on others. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.”

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Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).