

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Convincing Work of the Holy Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“...a natural (soulish) person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is discerned by no one.”

I Corinthians 2:14-15

“By faith we perceive that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”

Hebrews 11:3

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And He, when He comes, will convince the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment...”

John 16:7-8

This past few weeks, we have been thinking about the drastically different reactions of people to the Supreme Court’s decision requiring all states to permit the marriage of same-sex couples. Many people were upset, angry or grieved about this decision, viewing it as a further step in the moral decline of our culture. Many others were joyfully celebrating this as a wonderful civil rights victory for an oppressed, marginalized group of people. **It is important to attempt to understand where people are coming from.** We may not agree with them, but many of them think they are standing for high ideals, ...moral uprightness, justice, equality, fairness. **We must be careful not to demonize the people we disagree with. That is not helpful.** It does not encourage productive dialogue, or respectful interaction. **They are not the enemy.** “Our wrestling-struggle is *not* with flesh and blood, but with the rulers, with the authorities, with the world-powers of this darkness, with the spiritual things of evil in the heavenlies” (Eph. 6:12). Most people are unthinking, unperceptive pawns caught up in a much larger conflict than they have any awareness of. They may be well-read, articulate, and intelligent, but **they are being influenced by spiritual forces attempting to move them, and our culture, away from God.** The point is, **they don’t realize they are being manipulated or programmed. They sincerely believe they are making good, rational, and sound moral judgments.** The Bible tells us that Satan deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9), he blinds the minds of the unbelieving (II Cor. 4:4), and he operates in the children of disbelief (Eph. 2:2). ***This spiritual blindness is real.*** It does no good to get angry with a blind person, because they can’t see. It does no good to raise our voice to try to communicate with a deaf person. **Why do we allow ourselves to get upset with those who cannot see or hear what we are trying to tell them? We are playing into the enemy’s hands by allowing him to draw us into anger, frustration and aggravation. Then, he is duping us, too!** Paul tells us it is not necessary for the Lord’s servants to argue. We are to clearly and gently state our case, and pray that God will open their minds and hearts (II Tim. 2:24-26). Satan wants us to angrily burn bridges, and drive people into emotionally-hardened entrenchment. **God wants us to build bridges, open communication lines, and demonstrate Jesus in a way that opens peoples’ hearts toward hearing more about Him.**

In I Corinthians 2:14-16, the apostle Paul plainly tells us that a “natural person” does not understand or accept the things of the Spirit of God. **Spiritual insight and spiritual truths must be *spiritually perceived, discerned and evaluated.*** If a person is *not* spiritually alive or awake, he or she will perceive things *only* from a “natural” point of view. They do not *accept* spiritual things. To them, they are *nonsense*. They have *no credibility*. They are *foolish*. Those who talk to them about spiritual things seem to be crazy. They are unreasonable and seem out of touch with reality, ...at least the reality that *they* perceive. To attempt to convince them of something that requires a spiritual perspective, or spiritual insight, is a losing proposition right from the start. We *will* appear foolish, and our reasonings *will* seem like something from outer space to them. “Ridiculous!” Or, “old fashioned” or “judgmental” or “intolerant”, or even “bigoted”. They do not see what we see, ...or it just seems crazy to them.

To make matters worse, Paul goes on to describe, in the following chapter, how **even some Christians can be limited in their spiritual receptivity and perspective. He calls them “babes in Christ”. They are “carnal Christians” or, “people of the flesh”.** He is not talking about their physical bodies. Obviously, all of us have fleshly bodies. No, he is talking about a fleshly orientation toward life, a “fleshly” mind. Earlier in his argument, he stated that *spiritual people* are able to discern things spiritually (2:15). **People sometimes have trouble figuring them out, because they are being led by the Spirit and have insight that non-spiritual people do not.** They will sometimes do things that appear foolish or strange to others. **By contrast, carnal Christians operate by their fleshly orientation. They navigate through life mostly by the same non-spiritual principles and orientation as the non-Christian world does.** They may have some limited spiritual truths they adhere to, but **they are also pretty dull to the**

leadings of the Spirit. To them, spiritual principles and insights may also appear foolish, and be rejected. They are still living by the natural wisdom of the world system, not by spiritual principles or the leading of the Spirit. **Again, if they are spiritually dull, or non-perceptive, it does no good to get angry or frustrated with them.** They *can't* see what they *can't* see. They *don't* hear what they *don't* hear. Gently correcting or speaking our perspective, if given the opportunity, ...and then asking God to open their minds and hearts, is about all we can do (II Tim. 2:24-26). **If we get pulled into angry, divisive arguments, then we have been lured out of the serenity and clarity of the Spirit, and are most likely operating in our own flesh!** Look at the “works of the flesh” versus the “fruit of the Spirit”, and it is quite obvious (Gal. 5:19-23; cf. Jas. 3:13-18). This spiritual dullness explains why so many “Christians” are espousing the same rhetoric as many of the people of the world. They are dull to the spiritual perspective that deeper believers may see. It also explains why some believers may recognize *some* spiritual truths, but get pulled into foolish arguments. In that area, they are trying to fight a spiritual war with weapons of flesh. That smells more like rotten flesh, than the freshness of Jesus (II Cor. 2:14). Instead of drawing people *to* Jesus, it drives them *away*.

How do we develop a more spiritual mind? How can we grow in our spiritual understanding and awareness? (1.) From Hebrews 11:3, we discover that it is by faith that we come to perceive new spiritual insights, ...in this case, that God created the world from nothing. Faith is a *relational term*, not a *doctrinal concept*, in this passage. The writer is saying that **we begin to perceive things differently because our awareness and experience of God and His word grows** to the place where it is not difficult to trust that this Biblical claim is true. We may start our journey questioning whether the Bible is accurate regarding such things as the creation account, or the stories of miracles, for example. But, *as we come to know God* more and more, we find ourselves increasingly *convinced* that these accounts are genuine. How does this happen? **God uses His word to build faith in our hearts.** We are spiritually brought forth by the word of truth (Jas. 1:18). It is like spiritual seed which unites with a speck of faith within us, and begins to grow (I Pet. 1:23; Heb. 4:2). It is the spiritual milk and meat we are to ingest in order to grow and develop, spiritually (I Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14). **Those who will apply themselves to learn, study and obey His word will come to know new spiritual insights** (Jn. 8:30-36; Heb. 5:13,14). Faith comes from revelation (a promise or hope), motivates risk and obedience, and will result in further experiences of God. **(2.) God reveals Himself, and spiritual insight to those who diligently seek Him** (Heb. 11:6; I Chr. 28:9). We are told to “keep seeking the things above” and “set your mind on things above” (Col. 3:1,2). **(3.) Spiritual perception comes to those who ask God for it.** We see Paul’s example in praying for the Ephesians and Colossians (Eph. 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Col. 1:9,10). Also, Moses asked God to reveal Himself to him, so that he could serve Him better (Ex. 33:13). **(4.) A key ministry of the Holy Spirit is to reveal and convince people of new spiritual insights.** In John 16:7,8, Jesus said that it was to our advantage that He leave us, and go back to the Father. Why? Because, He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. **The Spirit would do many things. He is here to teach us,** and to bring to our remembrance what Jesus said (Jn. 14:26). **He also has come to empower us to bear witness for Christ** (Acts 1:8). He actually partners with us in enabling us to speak out for Jesus. *He* will bear witness, and *we* also will bear witness (Jn. 15:26,27; Acts 5:32). *He gives us boldness to speak,* as well as *guides our minds as to what to say* (Acts 4:31; Luk. 12:11,12; 21:14,15). **He distributes and empowers spiritual gifts** among His people, and **authenticates His word** by signs, wonders, and miraculous works (Heb. 2:4). **It is His job to reveal to the followers of Jesus the things that God has freely given to us** (I Cor. 2:12). In addition to all of these other facets of His ministry, Jesus said that **He will convince the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment** (Jn. 16:7,8). If people are blind and deaf toward spiritual truth, if they are dull toward being able to grasp it, **it is the work of the Spirit to open their spiritual awareness and plainly reveal to them that (a.) they are sinners; (b.) that God has provided a righteousness through Jesus Christ that is able to save them from their sin; and, (c.) that they will one day be judged by God for the choices they make in life.** They are accountable to Him. The word translated as “convince” in this passage means to “bring to light, expose, to reprove, or to show someone their true situation”. It is like an intervention organized to show an alcoholic that he has a drinking problem. The denial is so thick and so deep, it takes *many* voices to break it down and expose the truth to the addict. **The Holy Spirit can effectively pull back the blindness and denial, and reveal an entirely different perspective to a blinded, spiritually dull person.** This new insight, when embraced, becomes the *metanoia*, the “change-of-perception”, that leads to life (Acts 11:18). **Even opponents of the gospel can have their eyes opened, their perception radically changed, and they can then come to their senses again and escape the snare of the devil,** who had held them captive to do his will (II Tim. 2:25,26).

If God can do that, why doesn't He? There is a lot we do *not* know, but to some degree, people are in the spiritual state they deserve. They have *chosen* the blindness they are trapped in. God is *just* to leave them there. But, out of His great mercy, **God sent Jesus to die for our sins, the Spirit to open their eyes, and the church to partner with Him in prayer and in ministry to bring intervention to their door.** The battle is in our *walk*, our *talk* and *on our knees!*