

MAN IN THREE WORLDS

by Ray C. Stedman

In these Sunday morning messages, I am seeking to speak to Christians who are troubled by some of the problems that are confronting us today, and to unfold some of the overwhelming and devastatingly complete answers which Scripture gives to the burning issues of our day. We have previously dealt with the matter of the authority of Scripture -- God's voice to man in man's ignorance and need and the only adequate explanation of life as we find it in our day. Today I wish to take up a related issue, one which is a continual problem to a great many Christians and a challenge to the faith of many. The issue is: What is the relationship between learning -- the knowledge of man -- and the revelation of Scripture? Are there contradictions between modern science and the Word of God? Can the Bible compete with modern knowledge today?

You and I live in a university community. The great university which is here on our doorsteps, Stanford University, along with the very fine junior colleges and other schools in this area, represent in the eyes of the world the vast accumulated body of human knowledge, distilled by long and painful effort from centuries of man's search and investigation of life. To review some of the accomplishments of science in our own day is to be staggered in amazement. We cannot but be tremendously impressed by the wonderful mastery of many natural forces which were undreamed of a few decades ago. The advances that science has made in various areas of human endeavor, and the changes that have occurred in our lives as a result of these tremendous strides, are phenomenal. The world is very little the same as it was even three or four decades ago, due largely to these advances in scientific knowledge.

Therefore, there seems to be considerable weight to the claim that is being widely made in our day that if man is given enough time, using the equipment he already has, i.e., his reasoning ability, his powers of investigation and observation, and his ability to think through on relationships and concepts, he can solve all his problems. Therefore the gospel, the word concerning Jesus Christ, is an outmoded message for our day, a barbaric relic of a more ignorant age. It was all right, they tell us, for those days when man knew very little about the world around him, when he lived in superstitious ignorance that excluded him from understanding the world of nature in which he dwelt. But now that the ignorance has been dissolved and the mystery explained, we do not need this message any longer.

There are many who are shaken by that approach. But it is important to know that there is no issue which confronts human hearts today that Scripture has not already faced and squarely met. The Apostle Paul comes to grips with this very issue in the first letter to the Corinthian church, and in the second chapter of this letter, he devotes his thought entirely to the answering of this problem.

As you know, Corinth was a Greek city. The inhabitants of Corinth, as of all cities of Greece, were admirers of human wisdom. They were the heirs of the great Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the other tremendous thinkers of an earlier day, men whose reasoning has seldom been equaled in the many centuries following. The Apostle Paul was a very learned man, a very able man, who could quote the Greek poets to the Athenians on Mars Hill and who was acquainted with the philosophies and the philosophers of his day. He was a man of brilliant intellect, with a first-class mind, able to deal adequately with matters of human knowledge and wisdom. But in Chapter 2, as he writes to these Christians at Corinth, he throws down the gauntlet. He made, he says, a deliberate and unequivocal decision when he came to them.

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty word or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the

power of God. {1 Cor 2:1-5 RSV}

This introduces the theme of the whole chapter, which is simply a contrast drawn between the wisdom of man, the accumulated body of human knowledge, and the wisdom of God, represented in symbolic manifestation by the cross of Jesus Christ. The principles revealed of how far human wisdom is necessary in order to understand divine truth are as relevant and valid today as when the Apostle Paul wrote this.

He begins this theme in Chapter 1, Verse 17, where he puts his finger squarely upon the total inability of man's wisdom to cope with the problem of man's heart, that problem with which the gospel comes squarely to grips. In the process of developing this, he reveals three very profound reasons why he determined to set aside, as he says, all human science, philosophy, and logic in coming to Corinth, and to limit himself to a proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. These three reasons are very helpful in our consideration of this problem.

Let us look at them. The first is set forth in Chapter 1, Verses 18-21:

**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 cleverness of the clever I will thwart."
Where is the wise man? 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. {1 Cor 1:18-21 RSV}**

There you have the first drawback of human wisdom, in one phrase: "The world through wisdom does not know God." In other words, Paul is declaring to us the narrowness of wisdom. It does not reach far enough: It is utterly limited, it is circumscribed. What does he mean by this? If you are acquainted with the Bible you know that everywhere it views man as a three-fold being made up of body, soul and spirit. Because man is a three-fold entity, physical, the body, and intangible, the soul, and the spirit, having each its own peculiar and separate function, man is therefore a being designed to live in three worlds.

1. The body opens to us the world of matter. We see light, we hear sound, we feel the wind, we smell the odors, the fragrances, and stenches of the world around us. We taste food and drink, and by our five senses explore, observe, assimilate and investigate the realm of the material, the world of matter.
2. With the soul, the seat of the mind, the intelligence faculty, the emotion, the ability to feel and respond, and the will, which chooses, the volitional faculty, we may enter the world of mind, reason, logic, opinions, and attitudes -- the world of government, music science and literature, of politics, and the arts. By means of the soul we explore human life around us, the thinking of man. We can go back into the past. We can project ourselves, to a limited degree, into the future. We enjoy beauty and order and harmony. Through the soul we are intended to explore, correlate, and investigate the world of mind. This world also includes religion, i.e., man's opinions and attitudes about God; his philosophies, his concepts, pro and con, as to whether God exists or not, and if he does, what kind of a God he is, the total world of human thinking about God. This is the function of the soul. It is a rich fabric of discovery and application.

But in man's life in these two worlds there is one fatal weakness immediately evident. The two worlds of mind and matter, which the body and soul of man permit him to enter, are worlds in which man never finds ultimate answers to his problems. Specific areas of these may make sense, but the links which relate one set of truths to another set are lost to us.

For instance, we can build an exquisite, mechanically perfect car, but we find that we can do very little, if anything, about the driver. As a result, though we have invented a beautiful machine, we put the wrong kind of a driver in it and in a few moments the machine is a mass of wreckage.

A mathematician may work problems of almost incredible complexity, especially with the aid of such

electronic marvels as computers, but when that same man gets home he finds he cannot get along with his mother-in-law. The knowledge of one realm does not relate to another realm. Man lives his life trying to work a great jig-saw puzzle in which the key pieces are missing. Limited to the only two worlds he knows, but which are not enough to investigate all of life, man finds himself continually reasoning in a circle, like a dog going round and round chasing its tail. The difference is that the dog has the happy faculty of always managing to keep his end in view, but man does not.

3. The reason for all this is simply that all the key answers to life are found in the realm of the spirit, the only part of man which was designed to know and to touch God. This is why Paul says so flatly, "the world by wisdom knows not God." It does not move in that realm. It is not properly equipped. In man as he is, fallen man, the spirit is dead and unresponsive, uninhabited by the God it was made to contain.

Let me show you what I mean: If you explore the world of matter far enough, or the world of the mind far enough, you come in each case to a borderline of mystery in which you venture upon a darkened, unexplored, and unexplorable world which is nothing more than pure spirit.

For instance, when we trace the world of matter back to its basic structure we discover the atom. And within the atom, the nucleus. Surrounding the nucleus, apparently, are entities called electrons, which are electrically charged. Listen to what John McIntyre, a nuclear physicist, formerly of Stanford University and now in charge of the linear accelerator at Texas A & M, said about these electrons, in an article published in *His Magazine* :

By applying the usual concepts of space and time to the interior of the atom, physicists found basic contradictions between experimental facts. One experiment showed that an electron was a wave extending over a region of space, while the next experiment showed it to be a particle not extending over any space. Two more contradictory descriptions of an entity would be hard to imagine. Finally, as formulated by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, physicists concluded that there is a limit to the knowledge that can ever be obtained about an electron; the electron can be described equally well as a wave or as a particle, depending on how the experimenter examines it.

You see, our God, who designed the atom and its components, "is a Spirit," {John 4:24}. It is quite natural, then, that certain basic aspects of his architecture are beyond human ability to discover. At the edge of mystery man stands, unable to go further.

If you search behind the phenomena of emotion, will, memory, and thought, you come again to an unknown land of human motivation which the great Austrian psychologist, Frankl, calls logos, "the word," and his logotherapy is nothing more than a recognition of the existence of a third area of life, the human spirit. It is a shadowy land of mystery, yet within that land lie all ultimate answers to the problems of life.

Now, this is the realm to which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the sole and solitary entrance, as Paul declares in Verse 22, Chapter 1:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. {1 Cor 1:22-25 RSV}

The wisdom of man utterly fails to reach this essential area for it is too circumscribed, therefore, the world by wisdom does not know God.

But this is only the beginning. The Apostle goes right on in Chapter 2, Verses 6-8, to reveal another fatal weakness in man's vaunted knowledge.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of

the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. {1 Cor 2:5-8 RSV}

Here he is declaring the sinfulness of man's wisdom. He says there is a wisdom which is hidden from the eyes of a proud, self-sufficient world, a secret wisdom which they know nothing about. It has been in existence since the foundation of the world, but man in his pride cannot reach it or understand it. And, because he lacks this, the knowledge that he does have actually leads him astray and he ends up committing the most tragic and atrocious blunders. When Paul speaks of the rulers of this age he does not mean only those who are of noble birth. He means the leaders, the philosophers, the great thinkers, these clever men who pride themselves on being able to recognize greatness when they see it. They would certainly know another philosopher, they would recognize a great thinker, or a great leader. And yet, so blinded are they with their own conceit, that when truth incarnate stood before them, when the Son of God himself, the Lord of glory, stood in front of them all they could shout in their blindness was, "Away with this fellow, this agitator, this trouble-maker! Crucify him! That is all he is worth." From this fatal flaw in human knowledge stems all the strife and cruelty and violence of all the ages. It was this blindness that caused Lee Harvey Oswald to blow out the brains of the President of the United States. It is this fatal flaw, this same deadly twist which makes a husband snap at his wife, or a child to rebel against his parents, or the parents to be harsh and severe in their treatment of their children. "No, no," says Paul, "I cannot use the wisdom of the world when I come to grips with the essential problem of human life, for it has no power in this realm. It is too selfish, too self-centered, too sinful, there must be something more."

Well, you would think this is enough, would you not? But Paul is not through yet. In Chapter 2, Verse 14, he reveals yet a third flaw in man's philosophy and knowledge.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. {1 Cor 2:14 RSV}

Here he is declaring to us the barrenness of man's wisdom. This word *unspiritual* is actually the word "soulish." The soulish man is the man who is governed by his soul -- his mind, his emotions and his will. He knows no higher governing level in his life than that. And what does it say about the soulish man? Simply, that he is deprived of all that God wishes to give to man. What is that? What are these things? -- the gifts of the Spirit of God, which the soulish man cannot receive. It is life and the things which make life livable. "The gift of God," Paul writes to the Romans, "is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," {Rom 6:23b KJV}. That is, life as God intended man to live it. The lack of this is demonstrably evident all around us today. Man seems unable to lay hold of what God wishes to give him. He cannot live this life. Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly," {cf, John 10:10}. And it is the gifts that make life abundant which the soulish man is unable to receive. Not only life in heaven some day, but life on earth right now. "In him was life" {John 1:4a}, and that life was intended for man, now. It is a life incomparably rich.

Look at Verse 9:

**But, as it is written,
"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived [there you have the limits of human sources of knowledge: the eye-gate, the ear-gate, the reasoning power],
what God has prepared for those who love him,"
God has revealed to us through the Spirit. {1 Cor 2:9-10a RSV}**

There it is -- gifts of grace and power only made known by the Holy Spirit. Why is it that the soulish man cannot have these? Paul declares it is because he does not have the equipment to receive them. He cannot know these things, it is not merely that he does not, but he simply cannot. The soulish man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him. He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned, and he does not operate on this level. This is a frightful stumbling block to the intellectual. He cannot understand why the equipment which he has been using to investigate the world of mind and the world of matter and which has reaped such rich rewards of increased human knowledge does not operate in this realm as well. He resents it when this word says, "You do not have the equipment for this, you cannot move

in this realm. You cannot grasp these things, you cannot lay hold of these issues."

We know that the space in this room is filled with messages, pictures, and music coming to us on radio waves and television waves, but not one of us is properly equipped at this moment to receive them. We know they are there, there is no question about it, but we cannot receive them. This is exactly the case with the soulish man. There is an area of life in which the natural man, man as he is born into this world, is simply not equipped to operate. When he seeks God through human wisdom, limited to that knowledge which body and soul open to him, he denies himself his basic human inheritance. It is because he rejects the cross of Christ, which is the only way the spirit of man can be made alive and thus enable him to take from God's hands the gifts that God is eager to give.

Now, in contrast, Paul describes to us the spiritual man, in Verse 15. This is more than simply a Christian, it is a Christian who has been taught by the Spirit:

The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. {1 Cor 2:15 RSV}

The spiritual man, the man taught by the Spirit, whose spirit has been made alive in Jesus Christ and has been instructed by the Spirit -- what does he say about him? He judges all things. The word *judges* is a word that means "examines." He examines, investigates -- what? All things! There are no limits, no barriers. It does not mean he automatically knows everything. The Christian who thinks he knows everything actually knows nothing. No, it means he is set free to learn. He has the proper equipment. He has now been given all that it takes to investigate profitably and accurately any realm of human knowledge. He must, of course, go through the process of learning. But to the man who has been taught of the Spirit, any realm of knowledge is open. He is free to investigate and learn.

Christianity is not anti-intellectual in the true sense. It is not against knowledge: It is simply against knowledge without God. Christianity insists that man begin at the right place. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord," {cf, Psa 111:10, Prov 9:10}. It is only when man begins there that he has adequate equipment to put to proper use the knowledge he gains through the investigative faculties of the human mind. The spiritual man examines all things, but, Paul says, no man has any right to examine him. Why not? Right here he says the most astounding, the most dramatic thing this mighty apostle ever wrote,

We have the mind of Christ. {1 Cor 2:16b RSV}

Christians, taught of the Spirit, have the ultimate teacher; they have the mind of Christ, and who can examine him? Who can challenge the conclusions of the man truly taught by the Spirit? That is his question,

"For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" {1 Cor 2:16a RSV}

Or as he writes to the Romans in that wonderful passage in Chapter 11:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!

**"For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?"**

**"Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?"**

**For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen. {Rom 11:33-36 RSV}**

A whole new world of knowledge opens to the man whose spirit is made alive in Jesus Christ. In this realm the wisdom of the world is simply out of its class. It cannot contribute anything. It has nothing to offer. Only the man or woman, boy or girl, born and taught of the Spirit is able to understand true moral values, proper ethical insights -- that grasp of human life which takes the knowledge which the body and the soul accumulates, and puts it into proper perspective, so that man lives as God intended man to live.

The spiritual man begins at the right place. This is why Paul said, "I came unto you determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." If you do not start there, there is no other way. There is no other entrance into the realm of the spirit. "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus said, "no man comes unto the Father but by me," {cf, John 14:6}. Only the poor in spirit can receive the kingdom of heaven. The cross of Christ puts the pride of man utterly to death. A man who is nailed to a cross simply has nothing left. When we come to the place of the cross, when we are willing to say, "Lord Jesus, I have nothing. My vaunted knowledge, my supposed abilities, my talents, all that I have in myself is not sufficient. I see this, now. I see it will never work, it will never do the job, it will never solve the problem. I have nothing, Lord, unless I have Thee." In that place, at the foot of the cross, the wonderful transaction takes place. Jesus Christ makes us alive in him. "You hath he made alive," Paul writes to the Ephesians, "You, who were dead in trespasses and sin, has he made alive in him," {cf, Eph 2:1}.

The spiritual man begins at the right place, and from there he grows by the proper process.

We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. {1 Cor 2:13 RSV}

That is the process of growth, a study of spiritual truths illuminated by the Spirit. And what is this truth? What is this body of knowledge hidden from man in his pride?

Paul describes it in Verses 10 and 11:

God has revealed to us [these things] through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths [the deep things] of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. {1 Cor 2:10-11 RSV}

If God is the ultimate reality, if he is the reason behind everything, the most important body of knowledge we will ever have to do with is that concerning the thoughts of God, the thoughts God is thinking about this world, about our life, and about us. This is the spiritual man:

- Here is the man who has been set free from his fear, for he realizes that God is in perfect control of the affairs of earth. He sees the out-working of God's eternal purpose in everything.
- Here is the man who loses his hurry. He realizes that most of the mistakes made in the Bible were made by people who were in a hurry. He realizes that to him who walks by the Spirit there are twelve hours in the day, ample time to do everything that needs to be done.
- Here is the man who loses his blindness. He sees things in right perspective. Life comes into focus again.
- Here is the man who loses his impotence, who does ordinary things in an extraordinary way, because it is God at work in him.

Let me close with this question: Are you ready to begin?

Some may never have been to the cross and, as a result, all your feeble efforts to imitate the life of God in Jesus Christ are absolutely futile. You may be religious, you may be utterly sincere, but your religion is nothing more than man's thoughts about God. The only way in which you can be made alive in Jesus Christ is to come to the place of the cross and, bowing yourself there, say, "Lord Jesus, I have nothing. I need you."

Are you ready to begin there?

Are you ready to be taught of the Spirit, to lay aside all of man's wisdom and human knowledge, and to be taught of God that you may come back to the realm of human knowledge to learn these things in proper perspective, with proper evaluation?

Prayer

Our Father, just as Paul, preaching with such mighty power to these Corinthians, laid before them the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus, the only One who is able to make alive the human spirit, so we ask that many here today will yield their lives to him, will invite him to come into their lives and make them alive in thee. There are others who have already done this, but who are seeking to work out their moral and ethical problems by the pursuit of human knowledge alone. Teach them Lord, to come back to the Book, to be taught of the Spirit, to learn here that which can only be learned in the realm of the Spirit, and then to view all of life from that perspective, that place of knowledge. In Christ's name, Amen.

Title: Man in Three Worlds
Series: Single Message: Doctrinal Topics
Scripture: 1 Cor 1:18 - 2:16
Message No: 1
Catalog No: 74
Date: November 29, 1964

[PBC Homepage](#) | [Discovery Publishing](#) | [Ray Stedman Library](#) | [Series Index Page](#)

[Copyright \(C\) 1995 Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.