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La W 144

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Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on 7th July 1994

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Corinthians 2:14

How clear, definite and final are these words, concerning every man and woman in their natural state and condition. It is absolutely impossible that such should receive the things of the Spirit of God – that is in the love of them and in the longing after them – for all such things, to the natural man and the natural heart, are absolute foolishness. It is therefore vitally necessary that if you and I differ from what is recorded in this verse, we must be given a spiritual nature, spiritual eyes, spiritual understanding, and that gracious revelation and manifestation of the Spirit to our hearts, respecting the things of the Spirit of God.

Some years ago now, I trust that these words were just a little comfort to my then very troubled heart, for I could I believe, honestly say that it did *not* apply – that these things of the Spirit of God were not foolishness to me, but they were the only ground and hope of my soul, both for time and for eternity. But there is a point or two I want to notice regarding the absolute certainty of what is here recorded. We have here an absolute and complete impossibility, no matter how men may flatter themselves concerning the matter. In another place, we read that the blessed, glorious, wondrous cross of Christ is to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. Is it to us? or has God wrought a blessed difference in our hearts? If He has, we shall truly prove, and shall not need teaching twice, that the natural man, the old man, our natural heart, our fallen heart, will never, never, *never* change; it cannot be reformed. It is all we have, before God is pleased to quicken us by the Spirit into divine life. And as I have so many times felt and said, the natural heart of man cannot be made spiritual, it never will and never can receive the things of the Spirit of God; there is no capacity, there is no desire, there is no ability. Right to the very end of our lives, if we are left to the workings of our fallen nature, yes, we will still reject the things of God – His words, His ways – as foolishness. It can never do anything else, and this at times will so perplex, confuse, trouble and distress a child of God when he finds in him still that which hates everything and everybody that is godly, and disdains still that glorious Man who came to save sinners, and will esteem the word of God but a fairy tale and foolishness.

Our old nature will ever be the same. It is impossible that we should look or hope for the slightest or least change in its nature, feelings, thoughts, understanding or conduct. It will ever answer to what is in our text: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.' It is impossible for us to understand in our own strength or power, no matter how sharp our natural understanding, or how great our wit, or how sedulous in seeking and studying. For the things of God are too deep, too high, too spiritual for the natural man to understand the least of them. This, we shall find is a matter that we shall have to prove in regard to those who may be near and dear to us: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.'

John Bunyan, after God had dealt so mercifully with him, given him a new nature, and converted him truly by the power and work of the Holy Spirit, began to understand those things which he understood not before. And meeting one of his old companions in sin and vanity and folly and filth, he reproved him and warned him very severely concerning his state before God. The only response he had from that character was that he laughed at him – and that is all the natural man can do.

What is most upon my mind in attempting to look at these words is to try and find out whether God, in His mercy, and by His power and goodness, has caused us to differ from the world that lieth in wickedness. No matter how high or great their understanding may be, even in the things of the word of God, the men of this world cannot receive the truths of the word of God savingly, neither do they understand them. As recorded in the word of God, the Pharisees and Sadducees rejected the Lord's Christ; they despised His salvation, and rejected Him and all that which He came into this world to accomplish and do for poor sinners. O, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.

There is no middle path or halfway about this. We either receive or we reject. Now has God given us that nature, that heart, that understanding, which longs to receive the things of the Spirit of God? That is, those things which it is the glory, prerogative, goodness, operation and influence of the Holy Spirit to convey into our hearts, with a saving knowledge and understanding of them – so that we can truly and honestly say that these things are not foolishness to us now. We then esteem them exceedingly high, as being the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation, to everyone that believeth. O, they are not foolishness to us, and at times, there is indeed an earnest longing and intense desire, before God, that we may be given an understanding – that which we have not of ourselves, that which can never be found in a natural man, but that understanding which is given by the Spirit. For to know these things that are spiritually discerned, we must have spiritual eyes, we must have spiritual ears, we must have a spiritual understanding – or else it is impossible for us to receive these things in that powerful, saving, gracious and blessed way, which is so vital and so indispensable. When they are received and they are *spiritually discerned*, then the power, influence and experience of them *are* felt. You see, there is such a difference between believing the doctrine of God's way of pardoning our sins, and to *receive* that pardon, to enjoy that pardon, to receive these things which are of the Spirit of God. To discern them – spiritually discern them – and know them for ourselves.

Let us look at a few of those things which, indeed and of a truth, are foolishness to the natural man and foolishness to our old nature. They are things that the new man, or that spiritual nature which is born of God, by the operation of the Spirit in the new birth, esteems of greatest value, sweetness and blessedness – and more important than anything beside.

In these sad and solemn days – not here I trust, but in many places – one hardly dare mention the word election. It is so scorned, hated and rejected by the natural man, that the natural heart rises up against it, with the bitterest enmity and hatred to God. But, my friends, is it foolishness to us? Is it not our ground of a hope of heaven that God in His eternal purposes and gracious will, has chosen us? It has then become a most precious and blessed doctrine and experience in our hearts, so that we do not think it foolishness, but embrace it. We have received it as that doctrine which is of God, that divine and eternal way of infinite and unfathomable love of God, in His purposes of grace.

The sovereignty of God – is that foolishness? O, how all men in their natural state, without exception, will deny God this perfection. They will hate God who is a sovereign God – they think it foolishness and there is bitter enmity and spite against it. But O I do hope and trust that some of us, at least I hope I can say for myself, I have been brought to love God's sovereignty. What could we hope for, or expect from Him, if He were not sovereign? His grace is sovereign, His mercy is sovereign, His love is sovereign, and His goodness is sovereign. O, it is a blessed perfection of Jehovah! Have we received it, embraced it, loved it?

The things of the Spirit of God – that is, those things which the third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, is pleased to reveal in the hearts of those whom He has quickened. O, how the Pharisees and Sadducees of old spake with scorn, calumny and derision of the Lord Jesus Christ – they rejected

Him; "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power" – that is, right or privilege – "to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:11-12) We read in another place: "Neither did his brethren believe him." (John 7:5) They were very close in seemingly natural ties of blood, they must doubtless have been intimately acquainted with Christ and His teaching, and observed His ways – but they did not receive Him – they rejected Him, neither did they believe in Him. O, my friends, it needs a power greater than the power of man, a power greater than the power of persuasion, and a power greater than all the efforts and ways of men, to change a man's heart and to give him grace and to give him understanding so that he receives the things of the Spirit of God. For nothing less than God's almighty power will do. O, there is nothing for it, indeed there is no way round it; there is one thing only: "Ye must be born again." (John 3:7) That alone will be sufficient.

Those that are born again have this new nature. They have a spiritual nature, they have a spiritual understanding and they will receive the things of the Spirit of God – as they are revealed to their spiritual understanding. And so they discern the glory, greatness, suitability, beauty and blessedness of them. O, they are not foolishness.

Now what do we think of Jesus Christ? Can we live without Him? Can we die without Him? Have we any hope of heaven apart from Him? Is there anything that stands between our poor, guilty souls and a deserved hell, but Jesus and His finished work? Is there any other ground upon which we can hope? He was rejected by the foolish builders, scribes and priests. They did not receive Him. But have we received Him? That is first in that earnest desire of the soul: "Jesus reveal Thyself to me!", "Make Thyself a living, bright reality!" Has God Himself made room in our poor hearts for Himself? Has He caused us to feel that aching void, which nothing can fill but Jesus Himself – so that we long for His appearing, the appearing of the Son of God, He who is the mystery of godliness, who became Man by assuming our nature into indissoluble union with His Godhead, according to the goodness and wisdom of God. Is it so with us or is it foolishness?

The cross, O, that glorious cross of Christ of which the apostle said: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) That blessed cross, and all which was accomplished thereupon – the agonies, the sufferings, the work of Christ, His glorious sacrifice, His substitutionary death, the glory that followed – is it foolishness to us? It is to natural people, but O, is our glorying only and alone in the cross of Christ? Is that the source of all that we hope for, in justification, sanctification, righteousness, peace, joy and rest? Is it our hope, or is it foolishness to us? Which side of the word do we fall? It is a wonderful thing, if we can truly and honestly say that these things, far from being foolishness to us, are our desire, our hope and our longing.

Now further, what schemes and what various means poor fallen man, in his folly and ignorance, has concluded to be some good way of obtaining acceptance with God and the salvation of the soul. That indeed is worse than foolishness. But O, the things of the Spirit of God! You know the remark has been made in the religious world, that imputed righteousness is imputed nonsense. Awful blasphemy, a terrible thing to utter. O, when we know something of what we are, in and through the Adam fall – our wretchedness, ruin, guilt, filth, nakedness, depravity – and have no other hope of standing before a Holy God but this; then to be clothed in the righteousness of another, Christ's righteousness. O, it is not foolishness; it is the simple and fundamental statement regarding God's sovereign grace. You know there are few, very few – only those who are taught by the Spirit – who are made unreservedly willing to be saved by grace and grace alone. The rest will add their little bit, they must have something of the flesh to rest in. They infer, if they do not say it openly with their lips, they infer that the finished work of Christ is not good enough, they must add their own little bit

to it. It is the greatest insult that we can give to the blessed Saviour. His work is perfect; His work is sufficient; His work is accomplished. Nothing needs to be added to it and nothing can be taken away from it. O that all our glorying might be in this – the Son of God, and those things which He has so willingly and so fully accomplished for poor wretched sinners, and that He has been pleased to make Himself exceedingly precious to us. May it be more and more so as we go on, and prove more and more deeply the dreadful depravity of our fallen nature.

If God withhold His influence from us, as to the feeling and sense of it; if He leaves us to walk in darkness; if the Holy Spirit suspends, so far as the feeling of it is concerned, His gracious operations and influence upon our hearts – then our old nature, our fallen nature, seems to gain the ascendancy. What happens to us? Why, we are utterly confused. We cannot believe, and our hearts are so tossed and so troubled that we call everything into question, left to ourselves. O, we are so full of darkness, deadness, and unbelief in our carnal minds and nature, that we may call into question every bit of God's word – and then all seems to be confusion everywhere. Now this is a painful path for a child of God when that awful liar – the adversary, the father of lies – works upon our old nature for then we find that we are no better than we ever were. We are just as ignorant, dark, carnal and foolish as ever. It will cause us to desire that the Holy Spirit will revive us again. And O, if He be pleased to come and reveal the things of God into our hearts with sweet peace, and to take of the things of Jesus and reveal them, everything is set right in a moment; we understand again the word of God and receive these things.

Now a little further. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.' It is the Holy Spirit's prerogative – indeed, the work of the Holy Spirit – to take of the things of Jesus and to reveal them here a little and there a little. For Jesus said: "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (John 16:13) Now not only is it His glorious work to reveal those things of God to the soul, and cause that soul to rejoice in them, to embrace them, to love them, to receive them and to desire them. But it is also His place and prerogative to communicate into the heart, fresh and sweet supplies of every grace and favour. Faith is one of His blessings – the living faith of God's elect. Why, how hard a matter it is for us, or how impossible a matter it is to the natural man, to see that it is "believe only." Yes, not of ourselves, not of a natural faith but the faith that God gives. For it is "not of works, lest any man should boast. For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:9&8) The natural man cannot possibly see how he can be saved without doing something himself. But God's people are brought to see that they are saved freely and fully, on account of another. When they are blessed to receive mercy, salvation, love, peace, rest and joy in believing in their hearts, then they will work with all the powers they have, from the life and grace that they have received. O, how many put the thing the other way around! We are not blessed *for* our prayers or our tears or our repentance; no! our prayers and tears and repentance are the fruit and effect of His work in our hearts. O this is something that the natural man cannot understand; but God's people do. It is not of works but of grace.

The Spirit is also that blessed and glorious Person, who reveals to His people the way to heaven. We cannot find our way to the city. I do not wish to enlarge my remarks much longer, but those of you who are acquainted with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, will well understand that there were more who appeared to be in the way, than those that really were. They were natural persons, they understood not the language, they were completely ignorant of the way, and some of them turned back. Well, they said, we have gone further than you and there is no such place as that which you are looking for. Ah, but what do God's people say? I know there is a place, and I know full well that

my heart is bent on obtaining to that rest which God has prepared. O, the preaching concerning this is not foolishness to God's people. They are from time to time, if God will, blessed with an earnest and foretaste. They say 'I know where I am going. I know where I hope to be – it is no idle tale, it is not foolishness, it is not the imagination of some deluded mind; there is a certainty, and I receive it and believe it and understand it. There are two destinations and I hope and believe God has fixed mine – that glorious heaven which He has prepared for His people.'

Well, I must leave it; but, my friends, I do hope that we fall on the right side of this word: 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' So may we not safely conclude that if we have received them, and loved them, and in our very tiny measure have been given to know and spiritually discern these things, God must have given us a spiritual nature? For the natural man cannot receive them, but the spiritual man does.

If not already so, may the blessed Spirit of God quicken into divine life those who are as yet dead in their natural state and condition, no change having been wrought since they were born into the world. It is a wonderful thing if that change has been made, for if God has quickened us, it is a sure and certain token that He intends to bring us into His presence, to all eternity at last. The Lord grant it may be so.

Amen.

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