

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

*But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot come to the Word of God and understand its meaning without the help of the Holy Spirit. And yet, how often do we turn to the Word and pray, not simply with our lips, but yearn for the Spirit to reveal the things of God to us? I don't think it's very common because, in truth, such a prayer is dangerous. Such a prayer requires us to deny ourselves and to look beyond our own thoughts and reason, feelings, and desires. And not just to push them aside, but to despise them, to pour contempt upon them lest God's contempt be poured upon us. For when we look to our own thoughts, reason, feelings, or desires, we make ourselves the authority of knowledge and wisdom. We take the place of God, and so we do not find Him in His Word.

Instead, our flesh tempts us to seek ourselves. It declares that if something feels right, then it is right; that it is better to live for yourself than to submit to another; that life is about fulfilling dreams, pursuing passions, and achieving goals rather than living a good, holy life, in submission to God and others. But this wisdom of man has nothing to do with faith in Christ, no matter how religious or spiritual we make it sound, no matter how reasonable it is, or no matter how hard it pulls at our heartstrings. Even if you had all Scripture memorized, this would do you no good unless you use it to submit to the Spirit and seek the One whom all Scripture is about, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

That is why discernment is essential for the Christian life. So much falsehood is wrapped up in Christian packaging. Some preach and teach that following our dreams and desires is the will of God, the reason for the Spirit's power in our lives. Paul disagrees. He argues that the cross of Jesus is the matter of most importance. We know God did not send His only begotten to suffer and die on the cross so that we could have our best life now. No, the Father sent His beloved Son as the sacrificial Lamb to overcome sin and death in our place. All who receive and believe this promise as their own have eternal life. And this salvation freely given is revealed to us by the power of the Spirit.

So we know how salvation was accomplished, but how is salvation given? This truly is a matter of faith, as it can only be discerned spiritually, that is, by the power of the Spirit. Salvation is given in ways our natural mind cannot comprehend. It is foolishness to those who are not joined to the mind of Christ. First, salvation is given to us through the Word itself. Jesus says in John 15, “already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you,” and in chapter 17, “sanctify them by the truth, Your word is truth.” Paul writes in Romans 10, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” In Ephesians 1, he writes, “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.”

Yet to the natural person, these are fantasy, meaningless words invented by ignorant men. Many occupy themselves with trying to disprove and destroy the Bible, mocking those who believe it to be the Word of God. Or they accept parts but reject others, believing they were corrupted, are no longer relevant, or are made up by man. But those who deny themselves and seek the Spirit of Truth begin to understand those things freely given by God. They discern spiritually from the wisdom of God.

The Spirit also reveals through the Scriptures that we receive Christ crucified for our salvation through His Sacraments. The Baptizer declares in John's account that Jesus baptizes with the Spirit. Peter preaches at Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Paul preaches in Acts 22, that he himself was baptized to wash away his sins. In Romans 6, Paul writes that Baptism unites with Christ in His death and resurrection. He also writes in Ephesians 5 that Jesus sanctifies His church, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. And Peter writes in his first letter that

Baptism saves us, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yet the natural mind hears the words and only sees water. It does not see or hear Jesus. Reason cannot believe or accept that there is anything more to this Baptism than water and words, at best an act of obedience, but the Spirit reveals to us this spiritual truth that Christ is present in and with and under that water through His Word. For this reason, the Spirit gives those who have come to faith through the Word the desire to be baptized, that through it, they may receive the promise of the Word and the water.

The same goes for the Lord's Supper. Christ declares of the bread, "Take, eat; this is my body, which given for you." Of the wine, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" In the next chapter, he writes, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord," and "for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."

Yet the natural mind only hears the words and sees bread and wine. It does not see or hear Jesus. Reason cannot believe or accept that there is anything more to the Lord's Supper than bread and wine and words, at best an act of obedience, but the Spirit reveals to us this spiritual truth that Christ is present in and with and under that bread and wine through His Word. For this reason, the Spirit gives those who have faith the desire to feast upon Christ, our very life, knowing that by His body and blood, our souls are nourished and strengthened!

The natural mind cannot comprehend the spiritual truth of Christ in His Word and Sacraments. Even we, as Christians, cannot comprehend Christ and all that He does without the Spirit. We either dismiss Scripture and the Sacraments or give them another meaning as we cannot find Christ crucified for our salvation within them. As we continue in this earthly life, our natural mind will always resist and struggle against the Spirit. Our flesh will continue seeking to define for itself what is good and right. For this reason, may we continually learn to deny ourselves and submit to be taught by the Spirit. May our desire increase as we learn to truly cherish His Word and Sacraments, freely given by God for our salvation.

*But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

Let your faith rest, then, in the power of God.

Amen.