

1 Corinthians 2:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. The psychikos anthrōpos (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος, "natural/soulish man")—unregenerate humanity operating on purely natural faculties—ou dechetai (οὐ δέχεται, "does not receive/welcome") Spirit-truth. This isn't mere ignorance but active rejection: mōria autō estin (μωρία αὐτῷ ἔστιν, "it is foolishness to him"). Fallen reason considers gospel absurd (1:18, 23).

The explanation intensifies: **neither can he know them** (ou dynatai gnōnai, οὐ δύναται γνῶναι)—absolute inability, not difficulty. Pneumatikōs anakrinetai (πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται, "they are spiritually discerned") indicates requirement: regeneration by Spirit precedes comprehension. This demolishes Pelagian confidence in human moral/intellectual capacity to seek God apart from grace (Romans 3:10-11). Apologetics cannot argue unbelievers into faith; only Spirit-regeneration opens blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). Yet preaching remains necessary means—Spirit works through gospel proclamation.

Historical Context

Greek philosophy prized human reason's autonomy. Socratic method assumed humans could discover truth through dialectic. Paul's anthropology is grimmer: sin has corrupted reason itself, making divine truth unacceptable. This echoes Genesis

3—fallen humanity suppresses God-knowledge (Romans 1:18-21). Jewish thought also recognized human limitation but emphasized Torah-obedience; Paul emphasizes radical need for Spirit-transformation. The "natural man" operates in Adam; only those "in Christ" by Spirit-union can comprehend spiritual realities.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the natural person's inability to understand spiritual truth shape your evangelistic expectations and methods?
2. What spiritual truths did you once consider foolish before regeneration, and how does that inform your patience with unbelievers?
3. How can you avoid both arrogance ("I figured it out") and despair ("they'll never believe") when recognizing only Spirit-work produces faith?

Interlinear Text

ψυχικὸς	δὲ	ἄνθρωπος	οὐ	δέχεται	τοῦ	τοῦ
the natural	But	man	not	receiveth	the things	the things
G5591	G1161	G444	G3756	G1209	G3588	G3588
πνεύματος	τοῦ	θεοῦ	μωρία	γὰρ	αὐτῷ	ἐστιν
of the Spirit	the things	of God	foolishness	for	unto him	they are
G4151	G3588	G2316	G3472	G1063	G846	G2076
καὶ						G2532
οὐ	δύναται	γνῶναι	ὅτι	πνευματικῶς	ἀνακρίνεται·	
not	can	he know	them because	they are spiritually	discerned	
G3756	G1410	G1097	G3754	G4153		G350

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 1:18 (References God): For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1 John 2:27 (Parallel theme): But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

1 Corinthians 15:46 (Spirit): Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

Jude 1:19 (Spirit): These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

James 3:15 (Parallel theme): This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

1 John 2:20 (Parallel theme): But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

1 Corinthians 15:44 (Spirit): It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 2:12 (Spirit): Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Proverbs 14:6 (Parallel theme): A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.

John 12:37 (Parallel theme): But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: