

# THINGS NATURAL AND THINGS SPIRITUAL

We live in a world of both natural things and spiritual things. The spiritual things are invisible to us, but the word of God says they are the greatest realities. And knowledge of those realities enables us to understand more about ourselves, more about the meaning and purpose of our world, and more about how to live successfully both for this world and for the one to come, than any other knowledge. Therefore, let no man discourage you from learning the truth about them.

Spiritual things may seem distant to us because they are invisible, but the Bible says that our very enduring identity is an eternal spirit. Our spirit is eternal because men are offspring of God (see Acts 17:28), offspring of his Spirit. And the evidence for the divinity of the spirit of men can be seen all around us. Our divine spirit is like the force of gravity, which is invisible but its effects are seen all around us. The effects of our divine spirit are seen all around us by our enormous intellectual and creative powers. And those things are becoming increasingly obvious all around us.

## Things natural that are invisible

There are many natural things besides gravity that are invisible. Among those invisible things is the radiant energy outside the range of light. Light is only a very small part of the electromagnetic spectrum. All the other forms are invisible to us. Examples are the radio waves and the X-rays. None of those things of reality in our earthly world were known before the nineteenth century. They are completely invisible to our senses.

Therefore, even though many forms of that energy are everywhere around us, we are completely blind and deaf to them. And we can only know they are there when we use things like electronic devices to detect them. Examples are radio and television receivers, portable telephones and other wireless devices of all kinds. Some of those kinds of radiation can damage our health, even to the point of death. Examples are the X-rays, and the gamma rays that come from radioactive materials.

Another example of invisible things in nature is microorganisms. God has always known about those invisible creatures. Therefore, he warned his people, the sons of Israel, to be careful about cleanliness, especially about dead flesh and skin diseases. And he gave many commands in the law of Moses for the purpose of protecting them from the harmful germs that are a threat to our health.

God did not explain to his people about the invisible existence of the world of germs, but those who obeyed him were protected. It was over three thousand years later, after the invention of the microscope in 1675 AD, that microorganisms were discovered, some of which cause diseases and death. And the discovery of those creatures proved that cleanliness is the best way to protect ourselves against the dangerous ones. The invisible world of microorganisms was completely unknown to mankind for thousands of years. Yet it existed and was a real part of the world, interacting with it for good and for evil.

There are many other examples of invisible things and forces in our world. Indeed, invisible forces are what hold all things together, including our solar system and every atom within us. And all of those things are part of our earthly world. Modern science has been able to discover many of the invisible realities of our earthly world. And applying that knowledge has greatly improved our lives. Nevertheless, knowledge about things spiritual has the greatest potential to improve our lives. But it can only help us when that knowledge is recognized and applied, just as with knowledge of things natural.

### **The natural man and the spiritual man**

Paul said that every man who refuses to recognize the truth about things spiritual is a “natural man,” and he is unable to understand the greater reality of things spiritual. Paul spoke of that when he was writing about the higher wisdom of God in contrast with earthly wisdom. He said, **“But we speak wisdom among the fully developed, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who come to nothing. But we speak a wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age have known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

**“But as it is written, What an eye has not seen, and an ear has not heard, and have not arisen in a heart of a man, are things that God prepared for those who love him. But God disclosed it to us through his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of the man, except the spirit of the man in him? And so nobody knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.**

**“But we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in things learned from mankind, in words of wisdom, but in things learned from the Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.**

**“Now the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to understand because they are evaluated spiritually”** (First Corinthians 2:6-14).

## **Spirit and flesh**

The difference between the natural man and the spiritual man is more than just how they think. For that difference in mentality determines how men live. Every man has a body of flesh like the beasts, but we also have an eternal spirit. And God is giving every man the choice of living only for things natural like the beasts, or living primarily for things spiritual in order to become one of his sons for eternity. For those two ways of life are in opposition.

The apostle Paul wrote many things about that choice. Here is one thing he said about it: **“But I say, walk in the Spirit and ye will, no, not fulfill a lust of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:16-17).

Walking in the Spirit, God’s Holy Spirit, means to believe and obey him. And Paul wrote more about that in this passage: **“For those who are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mentality of the flesh is death, but the mentality of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mentality of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not submissive to the law of God, for neither is it able. And those who are in flesh cannot please God.**

**“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him. And if Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up the Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in you.**

**“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to flesh. For if ye live according to flesh, ye are going to die, but if in spirit ye kill the deeds of the body, ye will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye did not receive a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God”** (Romans 8:5-16).

In the most general sense living according to flesh means living only for earthly things. We who love God walk not according to flesh, not only for earthly things, but according to the Spirit of God. And that makes us sons of God. (We are called children of God only in this life.) And after this life is over the eternal spirit of every child of God will be given a spiritual body, a masculine one. For Paul said, “**There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body**” (First Corinthians 15:44). Therefore, I urge you not to be a natural man and live only for your earthly life, but live primarily for things spiritual so that you can become a son of God for eternity.

### **Confirming the truth of things**

Knowledge in this troubled world, whether about things natural or things spiritual, is something we must all struggle to acquire. Not only must we study carefully to learn, but we must be very discriminating about what we accept as knowledge. For our world is filled with intellectual darkness and error because men are constantly imagining many foolish things. Therefore, every wise man knows not to trust every claim of knowledge, whether of spiritual things or of natural things.

There have been many religions, philosophies, and theories invented to explain the nature of our world, and the meaning and purpose of existence. If you decide to study those things, do so with great caution, because that world of ideas is a jungle. It is a jungle thicket of bizarre and conflicting beliefs. Those religions, philosophies, and theories are filled with evil ideas that can lead you astray, causing you to become lost from the way of truth about God and his righteousness. Therefore, I urge you to first become skilled with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With that powerful sword you can hack your way through that jungle without becoming disoriented and confused.

Some of those false beliefs also make claims of visions of things spiritual. God occasionally made some spiritual things visible to a few men during Bible times, but he no longer does so. Therefore, I urge you to be wise and reject all extrascriptural claims of visions of spiritual things. They are either fabrications or hallucinations, because God no longer reveals spiritual things that way. He revealed them when the Bible was being written. But the Bible is now complete, and it is the only true testimony we have about things spiritual.

Therefore, just as in the scientific world of our natural things, we need to be very careful to confirm the truths of the spiritual things. Natural scientists have been enormously successful in discovering the laws of nature and many of its invisible realities. And the reason they

have been so successful is because they insist upon confirmed evidence. They have invented many methods to conduct their research. And they are all designed to discover knowledge of things of our earthly world, and to confirm the truth of that knowledge.

It is indeed important for scientists to confirm the truth of their knowledge of natural things, but it is even more important for us to confirm the truth of our knowledge of spiritual things. For our eternal souls are dependent upon the application of those truths. And the way we confirm the truth of what we know of spiritual things is to carefully research the word of God. For that is our only source of knowledge about them. We study the truths of spiritual things from what the Bible teaches, the way natural scientists study the truths of natural things from what the Creation teaches.

The Bible is far superior to any other book. Nothing even comes close to its wisdom, for it contains the word of God. It was written by many men inspired by his Holy Spirit over a period of about fifteen hundred years. And it is very important to search the truth of what it teaches. Here is an example of the superior spirit of men who searched the scriptures to confirm the truth of what other men said about it: **“And the brothers straightaway sent both Paul and Silas away through the night to Berea, who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews. But these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all willingness, examining the scriptures daily, if it has these things this way”** (Acts 17:10-11).

One of the most important principles of confirming the accuracy of what we think the Bible says, is that nothing we interpret can be contradictory. When men interpret some passage of scripture in a way that contradicts what other passages say, then that interpretation is false. For God, who wrote the Bible through the hands of his prophets, does not contradict himself. Only unbelievers and scoffers assume contradictions in the Bible, because they will not accept the divine origin of its testimony.

I must also emphasize that passages which teach things clearly and plainly must take precedence over passages that are less clear. And that is one of the most violated of the principles of correct interpretation that men make. They often interpret some ambiguous passage of scripture to say something that clearly contradicts other passages where the message is clearer. Some do it in ignorance, and some do it deliberately because they want to promote some favored doctrine, especially one that is popular.

Some foolish men make light of the importance of correct interpretation. They do not think it is necessary to be strict about what the Bible

teaches. False doctrines such as “Once saved always saved,” and “Salvation by faith only,” make it very easy and tempting for men to be casual about the commands of the Bible.

Other men even promote the idea that the Bible cannot be correctly interpreted the same way by everybody. Some do not even believe there is a correct interpretation. They say we should just make broad generalizations about the truths we think it teaches, and forget about trying to agree about all that God commanded.

That is like some scientists claiming the laws of nature cannot be correctly understood. Therefore, let us all agree to disagree about the laws of nature so we can all get along. Can you not see how ridiculous such an attitude is? No scientist would ever have any credibility remaining who suggested such an idea. He would no longer even be recognized as a scientist. Who would believe anything he published?

Consider this passage by Paul: **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap”** (Galatians 6:7). If the laws of nature are incorrectly interpreted, then what we reap when we apply them is going to be very different from what we expect. And that is even more true of our interpretations of the word of God, because they affect how we think and how we act.

### **Advantages of knowing about the spiritual**

It is impossible to summarize all the great advantages of knowing the truths of spiritual things. I can only say a few words here to help you become more aware of the advantages of them. And the more you study the word of God, and apply its teachings to your life, the more you will be able to appreciate the great value of those advantages.

One advantage of knowing the truths of spiritual things is how they integrate with the truths of the natural things. And that gives us a very rich and powerful way of understanding our existence, and how best to live our lives. And the best part is that they offer hope of eternal life in the greater world of heaven.

The man who limits himself to the world of materialism is the natural man that Paul wrote about. Such men are unable to understand the greater reality of the spiritual things. And they are unable to see how the spiritual things interact with the natural things. Thus they are half blind to the realities of the world. That is especially true when trying to understand the minds and societies of men. For there are spiritual forces that influence us, and it is impossible to understand men without accounting for those major influences in their lives.

You may not be aware that modern science was invented by men who believed in the Bible. Since the Bible tells us that Jehovah is a God of law and order, then those pioneering men sought to find order in nature, and the laws that God imposed to produce it. One of those early discoveries was the orderly movements of our solar system and the laws that control them, which had been a great mystery for thousands of years. Isaac Newton, the greatest of those early scientists, said about them, "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being."<sup>1</sup> Newton was a devout Christian, and he was proud to proclaim it.

I grieve about how modern scientists, having chosen to forsake God, are foolishly committed to materialism only. They now claim the world developed without reason, and they look upon men as being simply another kind of animal. And that makes their knowledge exceedingly limited. For the greatest influences on the minds and behavior of men are things spiritual. Therefore, modern scientists cannot correctly understand many things about us. And that is the reason for the great contrast between the successful applications of knowledge from the natural sciences, and the feeble (and often harmful) results of the applications of what they proclaim as knowledge from the social sciences.

One simple example of that contrast is the fact that our well designed and constructed prisons are savage places that are overcrowded, and we have many of them. Applying what God commanded about justice would eliminate that problem quickly. Read my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ* to help you see how obedience to the word of God, whether willful or enforced, would greatly reduce evil behavior. And that would not only create more law and order, but it would allow righteous men more security and freedom to live independently and productively.

There is no greater source of wisdom about reality and how best to live our lives than what is found in the word of God, the Holy Bible. The book of Hebrews speaks of its power with these very poetic words: "**For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart**" (Hebrews 4:12).

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1. Isaac Newton "Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 34 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952). p. 369.