

of Christianity he will agree with us. Indeed, none are more pronounced in their admiration for the moral character of Jesus and the ethical code which he taught than many men of the world. But when we press them to the recognition and acceptance of the great spiritual truths of the Bible—that the very moral beauty of Christ, His sinlessness was due to His Godhead—and that all moral excellence in men must have its source in the regeneration of the soul by the Holy Ghost and be sustained by a constant and conscious life hid with Christ in God, they draw back and say we do not understand it, and what we cannot understand we cannot believe. Nor, dear friends, can we blame such men. No man can believe what he regards as an absurdity. He may believe what is absurd, but not as such. This, then, is just what the apostle says, “The natural man receiveth not, etc., for they are *foolishness* unto him.” And more, they are not only foolishness unto him, but they cannot be otherwise than foolish while he is in a mere condition of nature; “neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually* discerned.”

You will observe, therefore, that the distinctive doctrines of divine revelation can only be understood by him who receives the Holy Ghost, who gave those doctrines; or, in other words, that there must be a spiritual discernment or judgment in order fully to perceive and appreciate spiritual truth.

In unfolding this proposition I would call attention to a general principle which I think all will admit, *i.e.*, that in order to understand and appreciate any scheme or work, the genius or spirit of that system or work must imbue us. That which is the animating distinctive soul of the scheme must penetrate and possess us. We must learn its secret, that out of which it sprang and for which it exists, otherwise it remains an enigma, something foreign to us.

1. Take the line of illustration pursued by the apostle himself in this chapter as elsewhere: “For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?” How do men know each other? I answer, it is by the possession of a common nature. It is by a oneness of nature that men understand each other the world over and through all ages. The thoughts and feelings which animate one man’s breast fill the breasts of all men. Here lies the foundation of metaphysics. As a science it is built upon the sameness and immutability of human nature. Here is the reason of Shakespeare’s great popularity. He so embodies the workings of the human heart that every man, of every age and clime, says, “That is myself.” This is the reason of Bunyan’s ascendancy over the Christian consciousness. A tinker by trade, a preacher in a small neighbourhood when thrown into Bedford jail, he simply wrote out of his heart, and as he threw the working of his own heart, like a true painter, upon the canvass in a wondrous succession of pictures, all yearning souls everywhere respond as they see their own conflicts and victories portrayed. In like manner was the power of Jonathan Edwards as a preacher.

2. On the other hand, it may be said that there is no real understanding between man and the brute creature. The brute creature (all lower orders of creatures) communicate among themselves; they have what Mr. Colridge calls instinct in intelligence, and they know each other so as to act in harmony. They have a common nature. But in vain man tries to learn what is in the brute creature, simply because the great gulf of a different nature lies between the two.

3. To recur to the illustration from human nature. While it is true that because of sameness of nature in man, men universally understand each other in the great fundamental principles of our being, yet we do find persons so separated by different temperaments or dispositions as that in some things they are quite unable to appreciate one another’s feelings and tastes. One is so exquisitely organized in soul and body as to respond to everything beauti-