
Mission 119 Ministries

**DECONSTRUCTING CALVINISM
EPISODE 8: PILLAR PROOF TEXT 1
CORINTHIANS 2:14**

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SERIES GOALS

- **Short, focused lessons**
 - **Explain Calvinism**
 - **Address claims of Calvinism**
 - **Exegetically**
 - **Historical**
 - **Philosophically**
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FROM EPISODE 7

The Calvinist concept of total depravity means, among other things, that apart from God's regeneration, a person lacks the capacity to understand and believe the gospel. It is not that the person hears the gospel, considers it, comprehends it, and rejects it. Rather, he hears the words, but because he is so hopelessly and helplessly lost and unable to move toward God in the slightest, he cannot comprehend it and can only reject the message unless God first makes him spiritually alive by "regeneration," in which case the person not only comprehends the message but cannot reject it, for it is now compelling to him.

PILLAR PROOF TEXT

1 Corinthians 2:10 Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. ¹³ We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. ¹⁴ But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. ¹⁵ The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone.

OBVIOUS QUESTIONS

- **Does 1 Cor. 2:14 say that a lost person cannot comprehend or cannot respond to the gospel? If not, then what is it the natural person cannot understand?**
 - **We must consider the context...**
 - **What is the larger unit of thought within which we find 1 Cor. 2:14?**
 - **What is the argument and conclusion of that larger unit of thought?**
 - **How does our interpretation fit within (forward the) argument Paul is making in this larger unit of thought?**
 - **We must next consider the consistency of our interpretation with other passages in the Bible.**
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A LOOK AT THE STRUCTURE

- **When Paul came to Corinth, he did not speak in words of human wisdom, but preached the gospel and demonstrated the power of God (2:1-5)**
 - **But Paul does teach a type of wisdom to MATURE believers (2:6-8)**
 - **This type of wisdom was received by direct revelation from the Holy Spirit and could not be obtained in any other way (2:9-16)**
 - **This type of wisdom cannot be understood by a natural person because it involves deep spiritual matters (2:13-15)**
 - **CONCLUSION: because Corinthians are fleshly (carnal) Paul cannot teach them this kind of wisdom (meat, solid food) and instead can only give them milk**
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A LOOK AT THE STRUCTURE

- **When Paul came to Corinth, he did not speak in words of human wisdom, but preached the gospel and demonstrated the power of God (2:1-5)**
- **2 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, announcing the mystery of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**



A LOOK AT THE STRUCTURE

- **But Paul does teach a type of wisdom to MATURE believers (2:6-8)**
 - **6 We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.**
 - **This is the key verse — Paul rejects worldly wisdom but acknowledges he does teach a “wisdom among the mature”**
 - **But are the Corinthians mature? NO, and that is the point he is driving home. Despite their pride in earthly wisdom, they cannot grasp what he has for them because they are not mature.**
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A LOOK AT THE STRUCTURE

- **This type of wisdom was received by direct revelation from the Holy Spirit and could not be obtained in any other way (2:9-16)**
 - **9 But as it is written,**
What no eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no human heart has conceived—
God has prepared these things for those who love him.
 - ¹⁰ Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.
 - **Source of Paul's wisdom is special revelation.**
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A LOOK AT THE STRUCTURE

- **CONCLUSION:** because Corinthians are fleshly (carnal) Paul cannot teach them this kind of wisdom (meat, solid food) and instead can only give them milk
 - **2:1** For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready, ³ because you are still worldly.
 - Paul's argument is that he has a greater wisdom for them, that came by special revelation, but for which they are not ready to comprehend.
 - Because they are already Christians, this incomprehensible wisdom is not the gospel.
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FOCUS ON THE PILLAR

- **13 We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. ¹⁴ But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. ¹⁵ The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone.**
 - **Paul's point is that this "wisdom for the mature" came to him by special revelation and can only be understood by spiritual people — not all Christians.**
 - **Just as a natural (without the Spirit person) cannot grasp this "wisdom for the mature," neither can a Christian who is living fleshly (or carnally). Again, Paul says nothing about understanding the gospel.**
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WHAT ABOUT OTHER PASSAGES

- **Almost exactly the same thing taught in Hebrews 5, and again it is not comprehension of the gospel in view.**
 - **5:11 We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. ¹² Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. ¹³ Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.**
 - **The writer wanted to teach them about Melchizedek but they were only ready for milk not meat. Again the issue is a Christian's capacity for the deeper truths of God.**
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WHAT ABOUT OTHER PASSAGES

- **Jesus addressed comprehension in the parable of the soils.**
 - **Matthew 13:10 Then the disciples came up and asked him, “Why are you speaking to them in parables?”**

¹¹ He answered, “Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them. ¹² For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ That is why I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand.
 - **But if the natural man cannot comprehend anything (even milk) then why did Jesus have to switch to parable to hide kingdom truths from them?**
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CONCLUDING REMARKS

- **As always, context (including structure and the flow of the author's argument) is critical.**
 - **Other passages do not bear out the construct that unsaved people cannot understand the gospel (or cannot understand anything of the Word of God).**
 - **Experience does not bear this out either.**
 - **But if the PILLAR in 1 Cor. 2:14 falls, what are the implications?**
 - **Gnostics taught that only a select group could believe, and only when they were gifted with the "gnosis"**
 - **What Bible verse teaches TULIP / Gnosticism — that the lost cannot believe the gospel? NONE EXPLICITLY so we have to address a list of proof texts from which this is inferred.**
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