

The Spirit Searches Everything

1 Corinthians 2:6-16
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⁶ Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ 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"-- ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

I had a friend in college who would sometimes tell me after a long and engaging conversation, "Aaron, I haven't understood a single word you've said." He would do this out of a sense of mischievous humor, and we would both laugh recognizing the silly absurdity of his statement. Here in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, however, the apostle Paul is quite serious as he reminds the Corinthian Christians that to be a Christian in the world is to never really be understood by the world. As a Christian you could spend hours in engaging conversation with a non-Christian about the Christian faith, but without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in his heart you could expect to hear from your friend, "I haven't understood a single word you've said." According to Paul, unless the Holy Spirit reveals God's wisdom, no one will understand the gospel, the Christian faith, or the mind of God.

As we have already seen, the Corinthian church is a church divided against itself. In line with the world's wisdom, they have split themselves into various factions based on which Christian preacher they follow. Some follow Paul, some Apollos, some Peter (1:12). This is, after all, how the Corinthian world treated wisdom. First you hear a philosopher or public speaker, you buy into his views, you get on his team, and you then spend your time arguing about which team is better. This is precisely what the Corinthian church was doing with its Christian preachers.

So far Paul has been arguing that if you are going to be a Christian, and if you are going to be a unified, God-honoring church, then you have to abandon this type of worldly wisdom and embrace the wisdom of God. The real challenge for the Corinthians is that God's wisdom appears utterly foolish to worldly eyes. From worldly eyes the message of Christianity (the gospel), the methods of Christianity (preaching), the people of Christianity (Corinthian believers), and the preachers of Christianity (Paul) are all foolish. To the unregenerate non-Christian, God's wisdom is impossible to understand and embrace.

In light of these challenges, Paul now tells the Corinthians that although God's wisdom is foolishness to worldly minds, God's wisdom is truly wise to spiritual minds.

The Wisdom of the Gospel is a Mystery (2:6-9)

I suppose that the opening chapter of this letter would have been somewhat discouraging for the Corinthians. Paul has basically told them that everything about Christianity is foolish. It was not the most uplifting or inspiring message. Undoubtedly, some of the Corinthians would have been asking, "Is there any wisdom at all in what God has done?" Here Paul anticipates that question and gives an emphatic "Yes!" God's wisdom is truly wise; it's just that his wisdom is hidden from the minds of men.

Paul writes, **"Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away"** (v. 6). His message is clear. He is urging the Corinthians not to be totally discouraged. God's wisdom is not really foolish; it just looks foolish to the world. It is decisively not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age and thankfully so, because the world's wisdom and rulers are "doomed to pass away." God's wisdom is true wisdom, hidden though it is.

In vs. 7 Paul says, **"But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory."** Here the language of the King James more accurately reflects the Greek, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom" (KJV). A mystery is something that is completely inaccessible to our minds, something that we simply cannot figure out for ourselves.¹ When my daughter loses a toy, a doll perhaps, she will say to me, "Daddy, I don't know where my doll went. It's a mystery." And indeed it is a mystery! The location of the doll is hidden from our minds, and the gospel is just like that. It is a mystery, not because it is incoherent or can never be understood, but because its truths are hidden from the minds of this age.²

Paul continues, **"None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 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'"** (vv. 8-9). If you were to gather together the best and brightest minds of this age, the smartest people from throughout history, they still would never be able to comprehend God's wisdom. In fact, when Jesus arrived on the scene, the rulers of this age crucified him, thus revealing their ignorance of the true wisdom of God. In vs. 9 Paul uses a quote taken partially from Is. 64:4 to again emphasize that no human being has known what God had in store for mankind through his secret and hidden wisdom.

So, the wisdom of the gospel is not really foolish. It just looks that way. In reality the wisdom of the gospel, God's wisdom, is true wisdom, but it is a mysterious wisdom unable to be grasped by the unaided minds of men.

The Holy Spirit Reveals the Wisdom of God (2: 10-14)

Now a very important question must be asked. If the gospel is a mystery, if God's wisdom is secret and hidden, then how can it possibly be known? Paul's answer is abundantly clear. The only way that God's wisdom is known is through the action of the

Holy Spirit, revealing God's truths to our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit reveals the hidden wisdom of God. Paul writes:

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:10-14).

When I was a kid, my brother and I would play a game on long car rides in which we would each try to guess a word that the other was thinking. We would both concentrate really hard on the other's mind, and when we believed we were both finally thinking the same thing we would attempt to simultaneously call out the same word. The game, of course, never worked because it was humanly impossible for us to know the mystery of what the other was thinking. For us the game was more silliness than seriousness. We can know our own minds. We can never know the mind of another unless they tell us what they are thinking. Here Paul says that the reason the Holy Spirit is able to reveal God's wisdom to us is because the Holy Spirit knows God's mind.

Paul says that the Holy Spirit searches the "depths of God" (v. 10), and, just as our own spirit is the only one who knows our own thoughts, so God's Spirit alone knows God's thoughts (v. 11). The Holy Spirit has explored and searched and examined the very mind of God. It knows all of God's wisdom. It has studied the depths of God's mind. Here Paul gives us a glorious glimpse into the inner workings of the Trinity - and friends, this same Spirit that knows the mind of God ever so well, ever so intimately, has revealed to us the very wisdom of God! So now when we hear the gospel we don't hate it, we're not confounded by it, and we don't consider it foolishness. Instead we love it, we embrace it, and we now recognize that it is through this other-worldly wisdom found in the gospel that we have eternal life. The Holy Spirit reveals to us the very wisdom of God.

This truth ought to make us humble people. No one has ever become a Christian by simply "figuring it out." No one has ever become a Christian through their own wisdom. Instead, Christians are Christians because God has opened their minds to his wisdom through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is precisely Paul's message to the Corinthian church. They are boasting in worldly wisdom. They are taking pride in the minds of men and dividing against one another, and Paul reminds them that none of them are wise in and of themselves. Instead, their wisdom, that is the wisdom of the gospel, is an alien wisdom. It is from outside themselves. It has come to them through the Holy Spirit, and therefore they ought to live as humble Christians, boasting no more in the minds or ministries of men.

This truth ought to make us pray. If it is the Holy Spirit that reveals God's wisdom, then the best thing we can do is pray, pray, pray! We must pray for our non-Christian friends and family who don't know God's wisdom. We must pray for our pastors and teachers as they speak God's wisdom. We must pray for our own hearts and minds that we might receive God's wisdom and reject the world's wisdom, which is so alluring. This truth ought to make us prayer-saturated, Holy Spirit dependent Christians. While studying this passage I received a phone call from a church member asking my advice on talking to a man who refused to accept the truthfulness and authority of the Bible. My advice? Pray, pray, pray. It might not sound like much, but without prayer we ought not to expect much.

This truth ought generally to make us nice people. Too often Christians can be just plain mean to our non-Christian neighbors. Our public discourse can be harsh. We tend to say or think things like, "Those idiots, why don't they get it?" or "How stupid do you have to be to believe and promote that?" But here we run into a problem. Often times our talking and thinking in this way reveals the fact that we have forgotten that God's wisdom is hidden from them. They can't see it or know it or understand it. They are utterly lost and in a hopeless and desperate estate. Biblically speaking, they are blind and deaf. They don't have the eyes to see or the ears to hear (Is. 35:5; Mt. 11:5). They are dead in their transgressions (Eph. 2:1). On their own they will never embrace God's wisdom. So, instead of getting upset with the many who do not follow God's wisdom, we more often ought to pray for them, care for them, share the gospel with them, and generally just be nice to them.³

Imagine taking a blind and deaf person to a movie – a really good movie – and then getting upset with them because they didn't enjoy it. Is this not how we are often tempted to think about non-Christians? They can most certainly exasperate us when they reject biblical concepts and ethics. We often forget that their real problem is they are blind and deaf to the gospel, unable to help themselves, dead in their sin, and in need of a miraculous rebirth. Paul tells us in v. 14 that the natural person "is not able to understand" the things of the Spirit of God. Thus, the clash between Christians and non-Christians is not so much between two ideologies or worldviews as it is between the spiritual and the non-spiritual. It is a clash between living people and dead people.

Earlier in 1 Corinthians Paul wrote, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18). Here we must notice Paul's logic. The reason the word of the cross is folly to some is *because* they are perishing. If you go into a funeral home, the reason the person lying in the coffin will never take you up on your offer for dinner is *because* they are dead. They simply cannot go to dinner with you and it would be, of course, foolish of you to deal harshly with them when they refuse your offer. Likewise, we must remember that every non-Christian who stands opposed to the gospel and the wisdom of God is in fact perishing. They are blind, deaf and dead. What they need is not your anger directed at them. Instead they need a miracle. They need a new birth. And we who have been born again ought to patiently and prayerfully bear with those who have not been born again.

In many ways, Paul is an excellent model of how Christians should respond to our non-Christian neighbors. Think of Paul as he writes the book of Ephesians. He is in prison at the hands of non-Christian Gentiles. To these very Gentiles Paul has been called to preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone

what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (Eph. 3:8-9). In other words, his job is to reveal the mystery of God to Gentiles – but these Gentiles, unable to understand the mystery of God, have imprisoned Paul. Here Paul could have entered into a tirade about how ridiculous and unfair the unbelieving Gentiles were acting, but instead he offers simple Christian instruction, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). Isn’t this amazing? Here is Paul, persecuted by non-Christians, urging love and patience towards them as he continues his gospel ministry.

So we must remember, it is the Holy Spirit that reveals God’s wisdom. It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that Christians are made, and this truth ought to make us humble, united, prayerful Christians, generally nice to those who are perishing.

Spiritual People Live by God’s Wisdom

In v. 15 Paul writes, **“The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself judged by no one.”** Here Paul is not saying that if you have the Holy Spirit you are then beyond the discipline, counsel or judgment of others. Some Christians indeed see themselves to be so full of the Holy Spirit that they are absolutely above reproach on all matters. This is not what Paul means here. Instead, Paul is saying that spiritual people are able to “judge” or we may say, “apply God’s wisdom to” all things. They are able to see the true wisdom of God’s ways even when the world says that wisdom is foolish. The spiritual person is judged by no one, not in the sense that they are above reproach and are never wrong, but in the sense that those who do not have the Spirit can never properly “judge” or understand those who do have God’s Spirit.

Writing about Christian worship, Marva Dawn says, “Worship is idolatry unless it is a total waste of time in earthly terms, a total immersion in the eternity of God’s infinite splendor for the sole purpose of honoring God.”⁴ So from the world’s perspective our Christian worship should never really make sense. Worldly minds are not able to “judge” Christian worship rightly. Thus, if the wisdom proclaimed in Christian worship does make sense to the worldly mind, if the non-Christian is not befuddled by our singing and prayers and preaching, then it may be that we are offering only worldly wisdom. True Christian worship, on the other hand, is grounded in true spiritual wisdom. We live and worship by God’s wisdom, we judge all truth by God’s wisdom, but never will we ever be properly judged or understood by the wisdom of the world.

Paul continues in vs. 16, **“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.**” At last Paul has come full circle. God’s wisdom is unsearchable, he has said. It is beyond mere human comprehension and knowledge. But, God’s Spirit has plumbed the depths of God’s wisdom and shown it to us so that we now “have the mind of Christ.”

Do you have the mind of Christ? Perhaps you do... I hope you do. If you do, you are indeed a spiritual person who is called to live by God’s wisdom. If you do have the mind of Christ you will not be able to help abounding in Christian growth and maturity. If you do have the mind of Christ you will abound in true humility and love for the things of God. If you do have the mind of Christ you will unquestionably be praying fervently, worshipping whole-heartedly, and loving God and neighbor zealously. You will be striving for unity and serving others selflessly. And most importantly, if you do have the

mind of Christ you will be exalting the glory and wisdom of God, echoing John the Baptist's heart as he says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John. 3:30).

Perhaps like the Corinthians you do have the mind of Christ... but you don't. That is to say, you are a Christian; you are a spiritual person; you have been given the mind of Christ; the depths of God's wisdom have been opened to you; but you are not acting accordingly. Perhaps you continue to rely on the world's wisdom. Perhaps you are proud, boasting in mere men, and creating division between yourself and other Christians. Perhaps you have not truly rejoiced in the things of God for some time. Maybe you have not prayed as you ought or worshiped as you should. If this is so, you must heed Paul's call to start living in line with the gospel that has saved you. God has saved you, given you his Spirit, opened your mind to his wisdom, and now he calls you to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16).⁵

Perhaps you have never had the mind of Christ, your heart has never been open to God's wisdom, and you have never received the gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ. If this is you, the gospel call goes out to you today, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

We must now consider one final truth in closing. In v. 7 Paul tells us that God's "secret and hidden wisdom" is "for our glory." Thus, Paul is not merely concerned with wisdom as he writes to the Corinthians. He is ultimately concerned with glory, the great eschatological glory that will descend upon God's new creation as Jesus returns for his redeemed people. This glory that emanates from the being of our Triune God will be shared with all of God's elect so that we who have been called and justified by the secret wisdom of God will also be glorified (Rom. 8:30). This is our Christian hope and so we echo the words and worship of Paul:

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

¹ Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ's Church* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 1995), 44.

² The New Testament frequently refers to the Christian message as a "mystery" (μυστήριον) that was once hidden but now revealed, or as a mystery that is hidden from some and revealed to others. See especially Mt. 13:11; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 1:9-10, 3:9; Col. 1:26; and 1 Tim. 3:16.

³ Here we think of Paul's instructions for the Thessalonians' dealings with outsiders, "to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders" (1 Th. 4:11-12) and also Paul's requirement that overseers be thought well of by outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7).

⁴ Marva Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 11.

⁵ It is worth noting that although the Corinthians abounded in spiritual gifts, they did not abound in spiritual fruit. Contrary to some charismatic teaching today the biblical imagery of "walking in the Spirit" is used exclusively in reference to sanctification and spiritual fruit. See Ez. 36:27; Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16ff.