

Sermon 8: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16: The Wisdom of God

OUTLINE

A wisdom not of this world
A wisdom taught by the Spirit
A wisdom revealed to spiritual people

INTRODUCTION

I am sure you have had the experience when you have an argument with someone cleverer and more educated than you are. You can come away from such an experience humbled and bamboozled; you can be full of self-doubt. Especially if you have been sharing the gospel and gotten into some deep waters around God's truth. How do we know that what we believe is true when there are so many people cleverer than me who don't believe? It often happens to those who go to university, there they were living their lives in the bubble of their own experience taking for granted what they thought was true. Then they go off to university and they are exposed to a universe of views, of coherent and well-argued systems of thought. These worldviews will be antithetical and critical of Christianity. The believer will find themselves in a bit of a crisis as they have to look to the grounds of their certainty. What is the final bedrock that we rest our faith upon? It is of course the truth of God revealed by the Spirit of God. If you are a true believer, you have been taught God's truth by God's Spirit. Our faith is not built upon the latest science though science can confirm certain things; our faith is not built upon a philosophical system, though philosophy may have aspects of agreement with God's word. Our faith is not determined by our cleverness, or having answered every question and doubt, but because we have come to know the things we believe by the power of the Holy Spirit who has convinced us of sin, righteousness and judgement. It is He who humbled us convincing us of our sins; it is He who opens our eyes to Christ; it is He who softened our hearts and inclined us to faith and repentance. God's truth, which is infallibly recorded in God's Word, was applied by God's Spirit to your hearts and He saved you. Salvation is a miracle by God's Spirit not the conclusion of human cleverness, argument or effort. We know this but we forget this and we get confused, we entertain doubts, we listen to false teachers, we even take on board some bad ideas that lead us to do bad things. And so it was for the Corinthians as well.

The Corinthians have forgotten their dependence upon God's Spirit, they have followed false teachers, they have taken on board their bad ideas and attitudes, and now they are sitting with factionalism and division and a party spirit in the church as a result. Paul goes after the root of their problem, they have forgotten the gospel, they have forgotten how God saved, they have forgotten the impotence of human intellect and effort and opened a door that is resulting in a divided church. Paul has demonstrated that what the world thinks is weak and foolish, Jesus dying on a cross is God's power and wisdom to save. Paul has demonstrated the futility of following flashy public speakers because God's power to save works through the plain speech of a Christ centered message. In 1 Cor. 2:6-16 Paul is going to focus on how the wisdom of this world cannot discover the truth of God, and how it has to be revealed by the Holy Spirit. Now I do want to point out that Paul's overarching concern is the disunity of the Corinthians church, Paul began there in 1:10, and he goes back there in 3:1. In fact the tirade that he is going to make against earthly in this section is all to

show that Spirit taught wisdom results in the mind of Christ, a mind that is cross shaped and servant hearted, a typical emphasis for Paul whenever a church is divided, e.g. Phil. 2:5. In getting to that point and picking up the issue of their divisions in 3:1, Paul first stops to show the superiority of God's wisdom to the wisdom of the world. In the verses before us Paul makes three basic points, firstly that God's wisdom is not of this world v6-9; that God's wisdom is taught by God's Spirit v10-13; and thirdly, that the Spirit reveals God's wisdom to spiritual people not natural, v14-16.

A wisdom not of this world

V6, '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.' The Corinthians want wisdom, then Paul will give them wisdom. Paul uses several words ironically in this context which would have a specific meaning in first century Ancient culture, 'spiritual' pertaining to the Greek view of man's higher faculties is used by Paul to speak of the Holy Spirit not something in ourselves; wisdom and knowledge as well. Paul uses the word 'mature' here which is a buzz word which the Corinthians would recognize as identifying a top tier member of a closed society. Paul is using the word ironically. Paul is not saying that there are two tiers of Christians those in the know, and the lesser Christians. He is using the category critically saying that every single Christian who is taught by the Spirit of God is 'mature'. 'You want to be mature; you want to have wisdom? You have it in the gospel!' The gospel is the wisdom of God. In this section Paul tells us several things about this wisdom. The source of this wisdom is not of this age, or from the rulers of this age. They are doomed to pass away, why would you want to hitch your wagon to theirs. V7a, 'But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God.' 'You want mystery religion? I will give you mystery religion.' The gospel was once hidden, spoken of in promise and types and prophecies in the OT, but is now made manifest and is an open secret for any who will believe. V7b, 'which God decreed before the ages for our glory.' Do you want wisdom with an ancient pedigree? The gospel is foreordained from before creation. Do you want a wisdom that ends in a glorious climax of man reaching his highest destiny? Here is the best happily ever after, the gospel results in our glory, not by us forcing our will upon the heavens and glorifying our own strength, but through God saving us and conforming us into the image of His Son through our glorification.

We are often seduced by other worldviews because we do not realize what we have in God's truth and the gospel. In a world of toxic masculinity and feminism do you long to see men and women flourishing? Then pick up the Bible where men are men and women are women, they are equal but different, with different roles and responsibilities. In a world where socialist and communist notions of enforced distribution of wealth to help those who don't have what they need are clashing with capitalist and libertarian views of private property and personal rights, it is rest to pick up the bible and find an ethic of free generosity and private property under the notion of stewardship. In a world of Identitarianism, where we live under the pressure of self-creation to make up for ourselves a sexual identity, morality, purpose, what a relief it is to pick up the Bible and to told what we are by God's creation, men and women, made for marriage; and family; and holiness; and good deeds. In a world of racial tension where affirmative action and inverting power structures only stir up more and more racial hatred perpetuating the problem and not solving it; what peace can be had by joining the one people of God where there is no longer Greek nor Jew, but we

are all sinners who are saved by grace and are all saints, all children of God. The aspirations of the human heart cannot be satisfied by what the world offers it will only end in death, but we can have all these things in Christ. The Corinthians wanted wisdom, they wanted a robust system of thought that they could sink their teeth into, they wanted a worldview with explanatory power, they have it in the gospel.

V8, 'None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' Here Paul demonstrates the barrenness of human wisdom, not only did they miss the truth and not identify Christ; they committed the worst evil and killed Him. The futility and wickedness of this world's wisdom is exemplified here. Take the very best religion that the world had to offer, Judaism. Now they had taken the OT and changed it but it still had more truth in it than any other religion of the time. And then take the very best of the ancient world's governments, Rome. Rome was the result of all the best in ancient Greek culture adopted and added to with some of the best laws and administration in the ancient world. The flower of humanity was nothing better than a self-deceiving murderer. Ironically that empire that ruled the world through the force of law and the threat of crucifying any who resist; is put to shame by Jesus dying on a cross. Paul calls him here 'the Lord of glory.' It has been pointed out how this is probably one of the clearest indications of deity as it echoes Ps. 24:10, which would have been well known to any Jew, 'Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!'

The wisdom of God is not the wisdom of this world is Paul's point and he adds a final argument by a paraphrase from the OT, v9, '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.' This is a partial quote of several parts of the OT predominantly Is. 64:4. Think of the eye as representing empirical evidence; the ear as representing received tradition, man's imagination the full potential of man's mental capacities. The resources of human knowledge could not come up with the wisdom of God in the gospel. As someone has said, these verses are most often read at funerals because many think that the words 'what God has prepared' is speaking of heaven, but they are not. The thing God had decreed before the ages, had hidden but has now revealed, which human knowledge cannot discover, and has to be revealed by the Spirit is God's plan of salvation in Christ. Life through death; glory through a cross; God becoming a man; the innocent becoming sin; the sinner becoming a child of God, who could have dreamed it up, none of us.

A wisdom taught by the Spirit

We have wisdom not of this world, and we learn it by the Spirit. This is Paul's next point. V10, 'these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.' Revealed not discovered. We are not the Creators of truth, there is no such thing as personal truth; nor are we the discoverers of all truth as if the human mind is the greatest tool in the universe and even God is subject to our scrutiny and inquiry. No, we are receivers. We are receivers because we are finite and cannot know all things, and we are receivers because we are sinful and even the mental faculties that we have are subject to the effects of sin so that we suppress the truth in unrighteousness and self-deceive. The truth of God can only come to us by a process of revelation, and this by the Spirit of God.

Paul points out that the Spirit alone is qualified to reveal God's truth, because it is only the Spirit who can search everything including the depths of God's thoughts and plan. V11, '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.' Now we need to pay close attention to Paul's explanations here, for in his explanations he proves the Trinity. He begins with our experience of knowing our own minds and no one else being able to read our thoughts. But God is different, He is one God in three persons and the Spirit of God has access and knows all the thoughts of God. Now no one can know God's mind unless that person is infinite, and on top of that ability there is one in God who knows all God's thoughts. Paul is assuming the omniscience of the Spirit, and another person distinct from yet indwelling the Godhead. Paul is not seeing the Holy Spirit as a part of God, the whole of the NT personalizes the Spirit. He has a will, He intercedes for us, He can be blasphemed, and grieved, and here He knows God's mind and reveals God's plan to us.

Paul reemphasizes our need for the Holy Spirit not the spirit of the world, v12, '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.' Now one of the things you might have picked up on in these verses we are looking at is the richness of God's grace towards sinners. In v7 we saw that God had an eternal decree of wisdom which consisted in the gospel and it was for our benefit, namely our glory. Then again in v9, we see that the wisdom of God consists in God preparing unimaginable things for those who love Him. And now here again in v12 Paul repeats this idea when he says that the Spirit is given to us by God that we might understand 'the things freely given us by God.' The Spirit is given by God because He wants you to know all the things that He gives to us freely. God as a Father seeks for His children to know His love, to know their security, to know the fullness of their inheritance and to have joy in it, and glorify Him for it. God's glory is made manifest when we see how generous and gracious He has been to the undeserving. Paul is merely repeating something that Jesus revealed to His apostles in the upper Room, John 14:25-26, "'These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.' John 16:7-13, 'Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.' And the Spirit has done this hasn't He? V13, 'And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.' We need to notice a dynamic here, the Holy Spirit is sent to the whole church, but there is a particular ministry that the Holy Spirit has to the apostles. The Spirit reminds them of the things Jesus said, reveals to them, things to come, and the apostles become the guardians of this Spirit revealed message, and they are the primary authors of the NT. The 'we' in v13 is Paul speaking self-consciously as an apostle, as an instrument of God's revelation to the church. This message, which is taught by the Spirit, is all about Christ, it is not like the messages the world

comes up with, and these spiritual truths are communicated in spiritual terms and received by those who are taught by the Spirit namely the elect. Paul is not only highlighting the miraculous work of the Spirit but how the Spirit in particular reveals the gospel through the apostles. In the 1st century this would mean giving attention to the apostle's message and not those of other sources. For us it means taking the apostle's writings, the word of God as our standard, and testing all things by it. If anything disagrees with the word of God, it would be like disagreeing with what the Holy Spirit said through Paul. Just as the Corinthians had to give heed to the apostles in their day, so do we through the word of God.

A wisdom revealed to spiritual people

Paul comes to some concluding realities in light of what he has said, v14, '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.' What we have before us is a key proof text for the doctrine of T of Tulip, total depravity. Sin has impacted every part of who we are as human beings including our ability to understand spiritual truths and respond positively to them. Paul describes for us here how the natural man, the unbeliever, does not accept the truths of the gospel, to his natural mind, because he does not have the ministry of the Spirit opening his eyes, it appears as foolishness. He does not accept the gospel as true because as Paul says he is not able to do so. Why do people not accept Christ, because they cannot believe apart from the power of the Holy Spirit opening their hearts to receive these truths, they are spiritually revealed. When you preach the gospel and you are coming up against a brick wall, there is no argument, no persuasive tool, no silver bullet that will unlock their hearts to the truth, only the Holy Spirit can bring a sinner to faith. Yes we preach the gospel, yes we use arguments, but the power is of God and not of us. This is why you should never be discouraged when you preach the gospel and people do not turn to Christ. Acts 13:48 reminds us why a person gets saved, 'And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.' This argument is brought forward by Paul to remind the Corinthians that they should stop being intimidated by intellectual people with their fancy speech and messages, even if they are cleverer than they and they reject the gospel. Remember that God has to open their eyes, just as He opened yours. It is ok if people cleverer than you are not convinced by your arguments, don't let that shake your faith and make you think you have to rethink everything, the gospel is revealed by the power of the Spirit. And if He is opening their eyes, this does not mean that everything you believe is not true.

In fact Paul says that the unbeliever is not in any position because of the need of the Holy Spirit to judge the truths of the gospel, v15, 'The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.' We have all the aces, we are able to test all things by the truth of God's word, and the unbeliever doesn't even have the necessary beginning to wage a critique against what we believe.

Paul concludes this section with two condensed ideas, v16, "'For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.' Firstly, when pitting the unbelieving mind against the truth revealed by the Spirit, Paul highlights the disadvantage of any human being when trying to critique God's truth, 'who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?' And as believers we have this truth taught to us by the Spirit, we have the

mind of Christ. Paul is saying that every believer has the mind of Christ. This would include of course the truths about the gospel that we need to believe in order to get saved; but it appears as if Paul is saying more by this. Not only is he saying that we know enough to be saved, but those truths renovate us so that the Christ we learn about for salvation also shapes us so that we imitate His way of thinking and doing. It is no mistake that when Paul is addressing the matter of disunity in the Philippian church he writes this, 2:3-5, 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.' Paul will launch from the Spirit taught truths that teach us the gospel to the radical inconsistency of disunity then among believer, 3:1-5.

Let us conclude. Paul has reminded the Corinthians that we have a wisdom that is not of this world, a wisdom that must be revealed by the Holy Spirit, a wisdom that the natural man cannot and will not receive apart from the Holy Spirit and we who are saved have only received it on account of the sovereign working of God's grace. He teaches them this in order to help them not be intimidated and confused by human wisdom thereby opening themselves up to all sorts of man following and the divisions that follow it. We can apply the truths to ourselves in the following way. Firstly, when you preach don't be put off by unbelief, it is God who opens their hearts. Plow on sowing the seed, praying that God will give the increase. Secondly, do not be intimidated by the deep and impressive systems of unbelieving thought that stand against Christianity and are so hostile. Remember that they cannot see until God opens their eyes, we have the truth, we are able to judge all the systems of truth in this world but the unbelieving mind does not even have the tools to test the gospel. And thirdly, and we will say more about this moving forward, remember that the truths of the gospel not only shape what we believe but also how we live, we must make sure we do have the mind of Christ and imitate His grace towards each other.