

## Revealed by the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

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June 28, 2009 – Trinity 3

Last week we looked at the second half of 1 Corinthians 1, where St. Paul reminded people about the centrality of the cross of Christ. They were splitting up and turning into preacher groupies and Paul reminded them: it's not about the preacher, it's about the message – it's about the Cross! God's wisdom isn't the world's wisdom – the two are diametrically opposed and yet the Corinthians were trying to combine the two. The world's wisdom says that if you want people to hear a message, you have to deliver it – preach it – eloquently. And yet God sent Paul, with his bad eyes, his speech impediment, and all his other shortcomings to preach the “foolish” message of the cross. Worldly wisdom would never send a feeble preacher and it would never preach the cross. In the world's thinking, dead messiahs don't save, and yet that's what God did. He sent the Messiah to die. God's wisdom is foolishness to the world – to the person whose mind has not been renewed by the Holy Spirit. And that's St. Paul's argument here in Chapter 2. Look at 1 Corinthians 2:1-2:

**And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**

You see, Paul understood God's way of doing things. The Church today needs to hear these words. I get stuff in the mail. I read books. And a lot of what has become “conventional wisdom” in the Church in the last few decades is all about basically how to sugar-coat the cross. A lot of the current literature on preaching actually says, “Don't talk about sin. Don't talk about the cross. Because, you know, people don't want to hear about that. Tell people what they want to hear – what makes them feel good and feel good about themselves. Tell them what God can do for them. If you talk about sin and hell and the cross, it just turns people off.”

And I want to say, ‘Um, hello??? What's the most important thing God can do for them? He can take away their sins, but first they have to put their trust in Jesus Christ, and to do that they have to know they need him!’ The Church panders to the world's wisdom instead of preaching God's wisdom.

Yes, that message is going to be considered foolish to a lot of the people who hear it. But convincing them otherwise isn't our job. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. Whenever preachers start trying to do the persuading themselves, the message gets compromised, because they try to do it by introducing the world's wisdom into the message. They turn the cross into a symbol for self-help. They turn the message that men and women are sinners in need of a Saviour into “You're nice; God's nice; so be nice.” The saving power of the Gospel gets lost when we try to do the Spirit's work ourselves.

The fact is that the true and unadulterated message of the cross is an offence to men and women, because it reminds them that they aren't as good as they think they are. It deflates their pride. It humbles them and reminds them that they aren't God. It calls them to trust not in themselves, but in the real, one, and true God. And for that reason the message of the cross *will* be rejected by many. But that's no reason for compromise, because *no other message can save!* The job that God has given us is to share the message of the cross of Christ – full-strength, undiluted, and unadulterated by worldly wisdom and gimmicks. *His* job is to soften hearts and minds and to bring the fruit of repentance and conversion. And history shows us that every time Christians have confused those two roles – every time they've taken responsibility for moving men's hearts to conversion – the message of the cross is lost. Remember: be faithful in sharing the cross. God will take care of the rest.

St. Paul goes on:

**And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.** (1 Corinthians 2:3-5)

Are you ever scared to share the message of the cross? You're in good company! The book of Acts tells us that St. Paul came to Corinth from Athens, and that he went alone to Athens after he was driven out of Thessalonika, Philippi, and Berea. He had been driven out of those towns because of his message and when he got to Athens he tried to preach in the Areopagus – the marketplace where speakers stood to teach – but his message wasn't received there either. He had preached the cross of Christ, but the people wouldn't hear it. So imagine how he felt when he got to Corinth. “Are they going to run me out too?” maybe he was asking. He was probably feeling pretty ineffective. It's easy for a preacher to get discouraged that way. And so he showed up at the synagogue in Corinth feeling weak, fearful, and was trembling the first time he got up to speak. And yet the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision, Acts 18:9-10 tells us, and he said, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you.” And so he preached the cross at Corinth.

And pretty soon Paul's preaching was bearing fruit, even though it was weak by worldly standards and proclaimed a message that the world thought was foolish. The leaders of the synagogue were the first to believe and others followed and pretty soon there was a new Church in Corinth.

These ought to be encouraging words to us. How many of you here are afraid of God's call to share your faith with others? How many of you have actually shared the cross with someone who then rejected it? How many of you are just plain scared to share it because you can't share it eloquently or with persuasive arguments? Maybe you know the questions will come and you can't answer them all. If you feel that way, you're in good company, because in many ways that was St. Paul. He was afraid and trembling, and yet he preached the cross anyway. The key is to remember that the message is the cross of Christ. That's it. Don't get sidetracked with other things. Don't feel you need to appeal to worldly ideas to combat the objectives that come. Share the message of the cross: that Jesus died to save sinners and rose to new life that those who trust in him might have that life too. St. Paul says, “It's okay if you don't have all the answers or if you aren't eloquent, remember the power isn't you, the power

is the Holy Spirit. Your job is to share the message, the Spirit's job is to move the heart and mind and to convince them of the truth of the message."

The end result in Corinth was a great manifestation of the Spirit's power as men and women heard the message and made Christ their Lord and Saviour – as lives were changed one by one. Remember 6:9-11? Paul lists all those sins and says, "Such were some of you, but now you've been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus!" And that was the second half of the message they shared: a changed life. It's how we live that communicates the Gospel just as much as what we say. The message was spreading through Corinth as people saw their friends and family and neighbours changing in drastic ways. If you will let God work in you, renewing your heart and mind, sanctifying you and leading you into holiness, the world will see it. That's as much a part of sharing the Gospel as preaching it with words.

The problem in Corinth was that they weren't getting all this. They were redeemed people, full of the Spirit, but they were still hanging onto worldly wisdom because it was so much a part of their culture. Look at 2:6-10 and consider how often we hang onto the worldly wisdom of our culture too.

**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. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 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"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.**

St. Paul's argument up to this point has contrasted the world's wisdom with God's foolishness and at this point it's clear now that God's way of doing things isn't really foolish, it only looks that way to the world. Paul's ready to turn the argument around now. We really should be talking

about God's wisdom and the world's foolishness. But he had to make this clear because the Corinthians didn't understand how foolish the world's wisdom really is. He's saying, "You Corinthians have it all backwards. You won't listen to me, you question my authority as a teacher, because what I teach doesn't square with your ideas of wisdom. Let me ask you this: Does that wisdom you're seeking after save the people who follow it? How many kings and philosophers have followed that wisdom, but still died. How many different schools of philosophy have come and gone over the generations?"

Paul stresses that God's wisdom is different from the world's wisdom. These people were Christians, but they were still following these old pagan ideas. Consider that it was people who followed that worldly wisdom that had been so threatened by Jesus that they killed him. And Paul's saying, "That wisdom rejected Christ and killed him. You call yourselves Christians and yet you're still seeking after the world's sin-clouded wisdom! You can't have both. *They're polar opposites!*"

Paul now says, "Yes, I'm the *real* preacher of wisdom, but it's God's wisdom, not the foolish wisdom of the world – and you guys should understand this, because you're mature!" That word, "mature", is made clear in Chapter 3. In the context, by "mature" Paul means "spiritual" or "spirit-filled" and in Paul's teaching there are only two kinds of people in this world: the unredeemed, who don't have the Holy Spirit and the redeemed, who are full of the Holy Spirit. There's nothing in between. He saying, "You guys are full of the Spirit. The Spirit has renewed your minds so that you can understand God's wisdom, so why are you still so keen on the world's foolish wisdom? What gives, Corinthians? You want wisdom? That's what I've been preaching all this time! The world doesn't understand it – in fact it so didn't understand it that it crucified the Messiah – but God has revealed his truth to you by his Spirit. So again, why are you still following after the world's foolish wisdom folks?"

God's wisdom is revealed by his Spirit. If you aren't indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you'll never know or understand his wisdom. The cross is not something that

we'll ever know or understand by natural processes. No philosopher who isn't grounded in Scripture, no scientist who isn't grounded in Scripture, no psychiatrist who isn't grounded in Scripture, no historian who isn't grounded in Scripture is ever going to know God's wisdom. As Paul says, no eye has seen it, no ear heard it, and no heart imagined it – his wisdom comes only as it's revealed by the Spirit. He goes on in verses 10-11:

**These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 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.**

That ought to make sense. Who knows your own thoughts better than you? Since the Holy Spirit is God, he knows God's thoughts! If you want to know God's thoughts, *listen to his Spirit*. He speaks God's knowledge in the written word and as he works in our hearts he gives us the understanding we need to apply that written word. So Paul asks, "If you want to understand real wisdom, if you want to understand the things of God, who are you going to ask? Are you going to ask the world's philosophers and thinkers or are you going to let the Spirit give you understanding?" Look at verses 12-13:

**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. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.**

Every one of us starts out under the influence of the world's spirit. We're born sinners. We're born fallen. Everything we do, say, or think is clouded by the sinful spirit of the world. We can never understand God's wisdom. Consider all those people who read the Bible, but are never saved, who never obey, who misinterpret and misapply what God says there. They're reading it through worldly eyes and with a worldly mind. But those whom God has called to himself, he has given his Spirit. Why? He gives us his Spirit to regenerate our hearts and renew our minds so that we might

freely understand the things he's given us; that we might see the world around us with new eyes; that we might read his Word with understanding; that we might hear the message of the cross and receive it as wise instead of rejecting it as foolish.

Consider the disciples. Did they take Jesus' message to heart when they heard it? No. They argued with him. They even got mad at some of the things he said. Right up to Pentecost they kept looking for a Messiah who would be an earthly king. Consider all those Jews who had the Old Testament scriptures in front of them all the time. The scribes and Pharisees who held in their hands God's Word, inspired by and spoken through men by the Spirit. And yet they were the ones who rejected the Lord Jesus. Consider again all those people in the world today who read and even study Scripture, but still reject Christ and who spend their time coming up with arguments meant to undermine Scripture because they don't like what it says.

And yet what happens when the Spirit enters them. At Pentecost the Spirit came for the first time and the disciples suddenly understood what the mission and ministry of Jesus were all about. Consider Saul of Tarsus, Pharisees of Pharisees, studied and versed in the Law and ardent persecutor of the Church. And yet when the Spirit came and indwelt him he suddenly understood God's Word and became the Apostle to the Gentiles. Consider someone like C.S. Lewis: an atheist and harsh critic of Christianity who set out to prove the Bible false. And yet the Spirit fell on him too and gave him understanding, compelling him to put his trust in the very Messiah he had spent his whole life considering to be a fool.

Paul says continuing on at verse 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.**

Take a natural fallen man whose heart has not been indwelt by the Spirit. His trying to understand and discern God's wisdom without the Spirit is like trying to pull radio waves out of the air without a radio. In contrast Paul says:

**The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.**

Paul makes up his own Greek word when he says "spiritual" person. He's describing the person who is indwelt by – who's full of – the Spirit. That's the difference between the non-Christian and the Christian. In Romans 8:9 St. Paul tells us that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ living in him he is not of Christ, and yet he goes on to say that those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God (8:14). You can't be a Christian and not be *full* of the Spirit. In fact, it goes even further than that. You can't *become* a Christian without being indwelt by the Spirit. It's the Spirit that gives us the understanding of the Gospel in the first place.

The natural man is blind. He's an enemy of God. He has no ability to understand the things of God. His concept of right and wrong is all mixed up. That's how you get a Nero or a Hitler or a Stalin. And yet, when the Spirit opens the eyes of the believer, St. Paul says that person is able to judge all things – his eyes are opened to right and wrong. That's the work of the Scriptures and the work of the Spirit in us. And not just that, but Paul says we are judged by no one. The Spirit changes our desires. He gives us a desire to do that which is pleasing to God. Why does a person change, often so dramatically, when they become a Christian? Because the Spirit changes the desires of their heart.

And St. Paul ends the passage saying, "We have the mind of Christ." As the Spirit works in us, both by his Word and by renewing our hearts and minds, he changes us so that we have the very way of thinking about life that Jesus himself has. The real mark of the Christian is that he or she behaves like Jesus. That's the fruit of the Spirit as he works within us. We'll live out his marks: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

That's St. Paul's message to the Corinthians and it's his message to us. If you are in Christ Jesus, each and every one of you is full of the Holy Spirit. And yet whom are you following? Whose

wisdom are you looking for or listening to? Are you still living according to the wisdom of the world or are you living according to the wisdom of God? If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives in you in all fullness and he's given you the mind of Christ. The question is: Are you letting the mind of Christ direct you?

Dear friends, there's nothing more radical than that: to act according to the mind of Christ. If you want to make a difference for God, if you want to know what his will is for you: leave behind the foolish wisdom of the world and live according to the mind of Christ. None of us is ever going to do it perfectly. We're all in the process of learning. But make that learning your *passion!* Pursue it with *everything* you have! To the degree that we are learning to mould our lives according to the revelation of the wisdom of God – to mould our lives according to these mysteries of God that are revealed in the Scriptures – to that degree we're letting loose in this world the mind of Christ. Think about what a radical and powerful effect that has on the world in which we live. This is the privilege and calling of the spiritual man or woman, who is able to live in the middle of the confusion of life today in such a way as to call others back to reality, away from the confusion and the illusion and the delusions and the fantasies that the world lives in, to the realities of life as it is in Christ. That's our calling. And what a privilege it is!

Please pray with me: Our Father, we're amazed by the apostle's declaration here that we who are open to the teaching of your Spirit possess the mind of Christ. We thank you for teaching us your wisdom, but we also ask you to open our eyes that we might see the folly of the world's ways – that you would turn us aside from everything contrary to the mind of Christ. Turn us from the world's lies about ourselves, our relationships, about what's important in life, and about how we live our lives. Father, teach us to be led in all these things by your Spirit, that we might release the awesome power of the mind of Christ into the world. We ask this in his name. Amen.