

1st Cor Ch 2:1-16

“Receiving The Wisdom Of God”

A couple of weeks ago I told you that one of the things that I’ve come to love about the apostle Paul was his tender and tactful heart of compassion, in that he was an *apostle* of Jesus Christ sent to establish and instruct believers endowed with authority *from* Jesus Christ *Yet* it was a very rare thing for him to “lay down the law” with people *commanding* them that which was fitting, but for love’s sake he would rather *appeal to* them, *plead with* them. You know it was that sense of, “I could force you into subjection according to my spiritual authority, but that’s not why you need to do the right thing. You need to do the right thing because you *love* Jesus Christ you’ve given your *life* to Jesus Christ therefore you’re to be holy for the Lord your God is holy.” I mean doing the right thing is always cool, but it’s so much more impacting and powerful when it’s done from a proper motive, not because I *have* to, but because I *want* to out of my love *for* and desire to be right *with* the Lord. and Because of that I recognize that I’ve been carnal here, or divisive there, or out of line in that way, so I repent, “God forgive me.” Paul just had this tender, and tactful (yet straightforward) way about him.

Something else that I’ve really come to admire about him as a person was his utter humility. and The fact that he led his life in such a way personally that he could point to himself as a model of what right on Christianity looked like practically. Not that he was perfect, he was as human as you *are* and I *am*; but when it came to practical Christianity, or what a right on approach should be evangelistically, this was a man who understood the heart of God. and So he was able to point to himself as a model after which we could pattern our lives, whether it related to Christianity; or our outreach evangelistically. and What a powerful testimony, to be able to encourage people to simply mirror what they see in you if they want to know what they should do or how they should lead a life that’s in line with the heart of God. Twice in this letter we’ll read where he says to the Corinthians, “*I urge you, imitate me.*” 1 Cor 4:16 and Again, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*” 1 Cor 11:1 and That’s the key, he wasn’t seeking to draw men unto himself, but he was urging them to lead Christ-like lives, even as he’d committed to do. He told the Philippians, “*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*” Phil 4:9 and Isn’t that where we all want to be? We want to be imitators of Christ, to lead lives that can encourage people that if they’ll simply apply the things you’ve encouraged or instructed them *in*, if they’ll only emulate the life that you’ve modeled *for* them, that God will be with them and honor their lives.

As we fall back into the flow of 1st Cor Paul has been teaching us about God’s wisdom (which men see as foolishness), Vs man’s foolishness (which men see as wisdom.) The fact that God doesn’t think as man thinks, and it’s not that God is simply a million times smarter than the most intellectual man, it’s that the wisdom of God is of a completely different order than man’s reasoning, wisdom, or rationale. Man’s wisdom is finite, God’s is infinite, man’s wisdom is imperfect, God’s wisdom is perfect, man’s wisdom...infected by sin, God’s wisdom...holy, righteous and pure. The 2 are virtually incomparable; they’re not even on the same plane.

Paul presented 2 illustrations in order to demonstrate that God doesn't think like man thinks. Exhibit A, the cross; not a wise *plan* in the eyes of man; Exhibit B, the called; not wise *picks* in the eyes of man. Because as a general rule God chooses the weak, foolish, and base things of this world, the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. *That no flesh should glory in His presence. Because Christ became for us the wisdom of God in that He is our righteousness, He is our sanctification, and He is our redemption, He is our all in all, our everything. So that as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*

and That is the platform that propels us into this next section, that when God is at work He does things in such a way that He gets the glory. *Whether it be in the cross specifically, whom He calls individually, or even the way people are reached evangelistically, it's all to bring glory to God and it's never to draw attention to man (remember they were divided over various teachers and preachers).* and Paul's point is to remind them that from beginning to end it's all about Christ, it's all about who God *is* and never about who we (as people) *are*. and So we read in Ch 2

Vs1-5

In these 1st 5 Vs the apostle lays out for us the proper approach, attitude, and aim of sharing the gospel. The overall emphasis being that he did things in such a way as to point people *not* to himself, but to Jesus. (He who glories, let him glory in the Lord)

and In Vs 1 he says, "Accordingly," the words, "And I" could've been translated, "Accordingly," or "Even so," he's drawing their attention and their memory back to the way the gospel was planted among them. It wasn't with fanfare or hype; it wasn't done in such a way as to magnify himself, but in such a way as to *glorify* God. He was careful to do things in such a way so as to point people to the Lord, so that people would see the *power of God*, not the *person of Paul*. God was the One who would be glorified in their midst, Jesus ministered the same way. We read in Matt 9:8 how that after Jesus healed a certain paralytic, "Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and *glorified* God, who had given such power to men." In Luke 17 after Jesus cleansed 10 lepers we read how that one of them returned to thank Him, and the record states that with a loud voice he *glorified* God. Even in His death as He breathed His last hanging there on the cross and committed His Spirit into the Father's hands we read that, "... when the centurion saw what had happened, *he glorified* God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!'" Luke 23:47 and This is the way that ministry is to be done; be it individually, corporately, or evangelistically, that when it's all said and done *God* is the One who's to be magnified, not me, not you. We so often want people to think *we're* something; I want you to think that I'm a really great and godly guy, super spiritual and all the rest, but that misses the mark. It's not the right motive, or the proper attitude, the fact of the matter is that we're to be about *decreasing* that Christ might be *increasing* in our lives.

Paul says, "When I came to you, it wasn't with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God." He's speaking now of his approach, and he didn't come to them with some spellbinding philosophy, or super slick strategy, he wasn't seeking to "wow" them with his words. He wasn't a *salesman* for Christ, there wasn't anything for sale, he wasn't trying to talk anyone into anything. He was simply sharing the reality of the work of God through the person of Jesus Christ He was testifying to the fact of the gospel, notice.

Vs2

and It's not that Paul wasn't familiar with the various pitches and techniques of his day, he could've waxed eloquently, and sought to dazzle them with spectacular oratory, but he *determined* not to do that. That word, "Determined" speaks of a pre-meditated move on his part, he had resolved that when it came to the gospel he was going to shoot straight. **He wasn't a salesman, he was an ambassador, and there's a big difference. A salesman will tell you whatever you want to hear in order to seal the deal. You want to know if this vehicle gets good gas mileage, "This car gets staggering gas mileage; you might have to fill it up once a month." Is the car dependable, "Oh this car will probably out live you before it even needs a tune up."** Whatever you need to hear, he'll tell you to make the sale, close the deal. An ambassador isn't like that, they come bearing a message from their king or their President, it doesn't matter if you like it, agree with it, they don't have to lull you into it, it's just the bottom line. "Here's the message."

and Paul was God's ambassador, and the message was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He wasn't about to cloud that message by his spectacular speech, impressing people with who he is thereby exalting himself and somehow hiding the very Christ he came to proclaim. and **We have to be careful lest we get in the way of the gospel, rather than simply being a servant of the gospel.** Someone said that one of the greatest testimonies to the power and the truth of the Word of God is that it's survived so many centuries of bad preaching. ;0) Like the church that had a beautiful stained glass window just behind the pulpit that depicted Jesus on the cross, one Sunday they had a guest preacher who was considerably shorter than regular pastor. A little girl sitting in the congregation listened for a time and then turned to her mom and whispered, "Where's the man that usually stands there so we can't see Jesus?" **and Unfortunately many are the men behind the pulpits who get in the way so that the people can't see Jesus, they're great speakers, but somehow Christ is covered up, overshadowed by their rhetoric and spectacular speech, oh they're entertaining, but you can be entertained in the movie theatre, or at a sports complex. and It's not that God's Word is to be boring (God forbid) But that the message needs to be clear, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, why?** Because that's the message that changes lives, the bible is clear that the *gospel* is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. and We're to be *determined* to keep that message clear.

Vs3-4

So from his *approach* we enter into his *attitude*, and we've already touched on it in our introduction, he was a man of humility. **Though he was an intellectual brainiack, and an incredibly educated man he didn't depend on his own ability, he'd come to learn that it wasn't his strengths that God was interested in so much as it was his weaknesses. Because its in those areas of weakness that God's strength is able to shine through the greatest.** Remember the Lord told him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" (and He said) *Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" 2 Cor 12:9-10 So he reminds them that he was among them in weakness, he wasn't this powerful presence of oratory eloquence.

In fear, remember the Lord appeared to Paul in Corinth and told him not to be afraid, and we're not sure what the exact reasons behind his fear were, more than likely persecution. He'd been ground in the mill of persecution more than once and it doesn't take that trigger being pulled too many times before we start getting gun shy. Pressing on in the Lord, but no one is superhuman; we still wrestle with the frailties of the human frame, fear being a reality in our lives from time to time.

He says, "My speech and my preaching weren't with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Now understand that Paul wasn't against persuasive preaching as such, when you read his sermon before Agrippa in Acts 26 you realize that he *knew* how to preach in an incredibly persuasive manner. What he's against, what he's rejecting is the idea of the one preaching, relying upon his ability to persuade through *human wisdom*. He's rejecting the idea of self-confidence, a plain and persuasive proclamation of the gospel is readily acceptable, but not a performance based upon self-confidence and crowd control techniques or slick tricks that manipulate the emotions of an audience. A man like Spurgeon was a gifted orator, his words were weighty, they carried power, but he didn't rely on his natural talents, he trusted in the Spirit of God to work in the hearts of his hearers, and He did. Men who share God's Word *should* prepare, they *should* use every gift that God has given them, but they're not to rely on themselves, but rather the *Spirit* of God to work in the hearts of the hearers of the *Word* of God.

The idea behind this word, "Demonstration" in Vs 4 is that of presenting legal proof. So that Paul is saying that the proof of the message he preached being of God was found in the fact that the Holy Spirit was transforming people's lives through it. In other words, it may not've been all that persuasive on a human level, but on a spiritual level it was powerful; people's lives were being changed. Now what was the aim of all of this? Paul's approach (straight forward) his attitude, (one of humility), trusting the Spirit to move in power rather than trusting in human persuasion? What's the aim, the objective in all this?

Vs5

You see if human wisdom entices you in, than human wisdom to reason you out, human wisdom is not a firm foundation, it's simply a matter of who can rationalize the best explanation, that's what debate is all about. So if your faith is at rest on human wisdom, someone has convinced you on an intellectual level, then when someone comes along that can confuse you and show you what seems to make sense otherwise, you'll abandon your pursuit of Christ. But if your faith is at rest on the power of God, now you're on a firm foundation, the reasoning and rationale of man is rendered incapable and unable to thwart you. If Jesus changes your life, you can argue with me till your blue in the face, I can't get away from the reality of the power of God in my life. and Paul realized that, so his approach to sharing the gospel, and his attitude in sharing the gospel was structured in such a way so that peoples faith wouldn't rely on the wisdom of men, slick campaigns and all the rest, but in the power of God that had transformed their lives, it's so imperative that people experience the power of God in a personal way. How is that going to happen? Through the message of the cross, that's where the power is, so Paul did everything he could to stay out of the way of that message.

Vs6-8

So Paul isn't saying that there's no wisdom to be found in the gospel, there's a vast wealth of wisdom that's unsearchable to the mind of man, we could swim around in the depths of God's wisdom for all eternity and not glean the fullness of it all. He's simply saying that he won't cater to whims and desires of man on the level of *human* wisdom. He says here, "We speak wisdom among the mature, yet not the wisdom of *this age*, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing." Look at Vs 7

Vs7

What is a "mystery" according to the bible? It's something that was formerly unknown, but now has been made known, and this "hidden wisdom" which God ordained before the ages that Paul is referencing is the gospel. In other words the gospel (and all the fullness to be found in/through it) was something that was unknown in ages past. Throughout the OT you see it here and there as by shadows, various types, it's pointed *to*, and hinted *at* but it's not clearly seen. Oh we're able to see it clearly because we have the whole canon of the scriptures, and we look back on it through the lens of Christ crucified and the power of the Holy Spirit. But if you're living 12-1300 yrs before Christ, and you're out there offering bulls, grain offerings, peace offerings, you're taking part in Yom Kippur, you're probably not putting all the pieces together about how it's a picture of Christ. You're reading Ps 22 about 900 B.C. you're not seeing a picture of the cross there because that method of execution wouldn't be devised for at least another 500yrs. So the gospel message was a mystery, "hidden" as it were by God, ordained before the ages, but not unveiled. and It's the gospel itself that lifts the veil and shines the light on the purpose and plan of God through Jesus Christ It's not human explanation, but spiritual revelation, notice.

Vs8

and There's a debate as to who the "rulers of this age" are. Are they present political powers, certainly they were acting in ignorance, Jesus Himself saying, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." But it's also possible that it's a reference to the demonic powers and principalities who rule over this world. The bible is clear that though God is ultimately sovereign and in control, that Satan is the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world. He sways the general thought process and the pulse of the people on this planet who aren't in Christ. and Though he knows the scriptures, he to would've been limited as to the fullness of what God was up to through Christ because those things were hidden by God. All he knew was that the Son of God would be born and that He would die, and he'd be happy to oblige in that, but as to the full significance of His death he couldn't know that. and He'd have *never* had Jesus crucified had he known that that would make for his ultimate demise, destruction and undoing. The bible is clear in Col Ch 2 that through the cross Jesus *disarmed* powers and principalities, having made a public spectacle of them, triumphing *over* them through it. But the point remains the same either way, they didn't understand what was going on or else they'd have never followed through on it, but it was necessary that Christ die as an offering for the sin of the world. So that He might become for us, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. These things were shrouded before, but now they're ours to rest *in* and rejoice *over*.

By the way this little phrase, “Lord of glory” is another beacon of light shining down on the deity of Christ, God will share His glory with no man, you can’t be ascribed the title, “The Lord of Glory,” if you’re not God. (Just a little side note thrown in there).

Vs9-12

How do we receive the wisdom of God? Through the Spirit of God. We often apply Vs 9 to the unsurpassable, unimaginable glory that awaits us in Heaven, and though it’s no doubt an acceptable *application* to say that we aren’t able to even conceive of all the things that God has prepared for those who love Him as we spend eternity with Him. It’s not (however) the proper *interpretation* of this scripture according to it’s context, because the whole point that Paul is making is that though these things were previously veiled, *now* they’re unveiled, before they were inconceivable according to our understanding, now they’re quite knowable through the person of Jesus Christ as by the power and person of the Holy Spirit in our lives. See, check out Vs 10. “But God *has revealed* them to us through His Spirit.” We’re talking about a past action with present ongoing effects. God’s done the work in Christ, it’s a done deal, and He continues to reveal them to us presently by His Spirit.

and Apart from the Spirit of God, you can’t know the revelation of the work of the cross, the fullness of what Jesus has done *for* you, exactly what that means *to* you, these things can’t be known apart from the Holy Spirit at work in a person’s life. Why is that? Well, the same way that the only one who really knows what’s going on down deep in your heart is you (your spirit), the only one that knows what’s going on deep down in God’s heart is God (His Spirit). and The beautiful thing is that through Christ God gives to us His Spirit, the Spirit of God literally comes into you, and begins to teach you the heart and mind of God, the revelation of who Christ is, the relevance of His work on our behalf. Remember when Jesus was speaking to His disciples, and He said, “*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*” John 16:12-14 That’s the essence of what Paul is saying here.

God wants you to know the righteousness He’s provided for you in Christ, the sanctification He’s provided for you in Christ, the redemption that He’s provided for you in Christ, but those things are communicated via the Holy Spirit.

Vs13

In other words human wisdom can’t communicate spiritual truths, the Spirit of God utilizes the Word of God to communicate the heart of God to us. But the Word of God doesn’t really come to life for us apart from the Spirit of God, they’re mutually inclusive and dependant upon one another.

Vs14-16

So as this Ch concludes Paul paints a contrast, on the one hand we have the spiritual man who’s tuned *in* to the Lord, receiving *from* the Lord as by the Holy Spirit. Then on the other hand we have the natural man who *does not* receive the things of the Spirit of God, in fact he *can not* receive the things of the Spirit of God because they’re spiritually discerned. and This is the state of every person apart from Christ on the face of the earth.

We're born as the *natural* man, therefore we have *natural* priorities, we're concerned with the things of this world. Coming to church seems foolish when we could be at home relaxing, out on the lake having fun, or out somewhere making money. That's the general mentality of the *natural man, the unsaved man*. and It's not that those things are inherently sinful, God knows where we live, He created us. He's not up there going, "There they are working again, I wish they'd spend all their time just worshipping Me." "What are they doing going to sleep, what a waste, they should be praying." God created us in this way, and we were made to function in and interact *with* a material world. *The problem is that the natural man's life is all consumed with the material world and can't really get beyond the material world, he doesn't receive the things of the Spirit and couldn't understand them even if he wanted to. Vs 14 tells us that he can not know them for they are spiritually discerned. Asking a natural man to understand a spiritual matter, is like asking a deaf person what they think of Mozart, or a blind person what they think of Rembrandt, you're asking the impossible of them.* They don't understand what you're talking about, and they don't understand you, that's what Vs 15 is ultimately saying. It's not saying that they can't point out flaws in the believer because they can, it's simply saying that though you understand them (been there done that) they can't understand you because they haven't been there, they can't see what you see, hear what you hear.

That's why prayer for that person is so important, because unless God does a work in that person's heart, they'll never understand, they'll never comprehend, and they'll never discern the things of the Spirit. That's why it's so exciting when a non-believer starts showing or expressing interest in the things of God, because that means the Spirit is at work, seeking to draw them, placing conviction upon them, calling out to them to come to Christ. Which brings me to a closing thought, being born a natural man, or a natural woman means to be void of the Spirit of God, doomed to eternal destruction apart from. How is one then made a spiritual man, or spiritual woman, destined to spend eternity in the presence of God? *By being born again. Jesus said unless a man is born again he'll by no means see the kingdom of God. How is a man born again? By faith in Jesus Christ trusting in the work of the cross on your behalf.*

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the work of the cross, and Lord I pray that each person here would have their faith established not on the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. That that personal and powerful encounter with You would be a working reality in each heart and each life. and We thank You for the gift of Your Spirit Who communicates the matters of Your heart to us through Your Word, give us ears to hear. and Lord may we see as You see, think as You think, and live as You lived, selflessly, sacrificially, communicating Your heart by Your Spirit to a hurt and dying world.

If you've never given your heart to Christ I want to give you that opportunity right now. If Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart, if the message of the cross is making an impact *on* your heart and you're willing and ready to say, "Yes" to Jesus, to place your faith in Him that you might receive the forgiveness of sins, and everlasting life. The bible is clear, whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. If that's something you need to do, than do it now, open your heart to Jesus and ask Him to come in.