

Servants of Wisdom

Printed Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1; 2:6-16

Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 1:15-21

1 Corinthians 2:1

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" - the things God has prepared for those who love him—¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. ¹⁵ The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶ for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Just prior to arriving in Corinth, Paul spent a brief time in Athens. This ancient Greek city was known for its great philosophers—such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Additionally, the city of Athens was steeped in false religion.

With only a handful of converts in Athens, Paul most likely left for Corinth discouraged. That is probably why he told the Corinthians, "³ *I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.*" (1 Cor. 2:3).

Although most Corinthians were not as intellectual as some of the Athenians, many of them were still enamored of Greek philosophy. For centuries, the people of Greece were told that their culture was superior to any other in the world at that time. Consequently, they believed that their wisdom was incomparable.

Paul, however, was not trained in Greek rhetoric. As a Jewish rabbi, his approach would have been quite different from that of the philosophers. Paul's mission was not to impress people with

lofty words. Rather, he was called to preach the simple message of "*Jesus Christ, and him crucified*" (vs. 2).

Lesson Background

Before Paul reached Corinth on his second missionary journey, he suffered repeated rejection. He was beaten and jailed in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica by a riot, forced to flee Berea, and laughed off of Mars' hill by the philosophers in Athens (see Acts 16, 17). When he came to Corinth (Acts 18), he probably was out of money and out of friends. Paul had left his various coworkers along the way to help lead the new churches (Acts 17:14). In Corinth Paul worked daily as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) and tried to present the message of Christ in the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 18:4). Eventually he had to leave that place as well (Acts 18:5-7).

Since Paul faced so much opposition, what should he do? Should he adjust his message to make it less offensive? Should he use more eloquent oratory? Should he try to impress people with his education or his wisdom? It was a crucial point in Paul's ministry. As Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians, he carefully reminds them which choice he made.

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine a passage in which Paul discussed true spiritual wisdom.

Principle: to recognize the Holy Spirit as the source of the wisdom that matters.

Application: to help Christians appreciate the ability that the Holy Spirit gives to accept and understand the deep things of God.

Upon his arriving into the city of Corinth, Paul may have been somewhat discouraged to hear that the church of Corinth which was founded by him, had much carnality and immaturity. They were more concerned with the worldliness than holiness. Paul had written this letter to the Corinthians in hopes of them taking their eyes off of the world and the culture around them and to follow after Christ who died for their sins.

1. What was the likely frame of mind Paul had upon arriving in the city of Corinth? Why?

Paul came to Corinth to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for sin on the cross, to those who were notoriously wicked and worldly. Paul came to Corinth after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, run out of Thessalonica and Berea, and scoffed at in Athens (Acts 16:22-24; 17:10, 13, 14, 32), so he may have been physically weak. But in that weakness he was most powerful. There were no theatrics or techniques to manipulate people's response. His fear and shaking was because of the seriousness of his mission. There were no eloquent speeches given or fancy words used, just the gospel of Jesus Christ!

2. What was Paul's primary focus when he came to Corinth? Why? (vs. 2-3)

First, Paul spoke about wisdom among them that are perfect. The word translated "perfect" is literally "perfect ones". It does not mean sinless or morally perfect. Rather, it denotes those who are spiritually mature in Christ. These are the genuine believers who have been saved by Christ's shed blood for their sins. The very fact that some of the Corinthians were enamored of worldly

wisdom and at odds with each other (3:1-4) indicated their lack of spiritual depth and maturity. Only the mature can appreciate fully how wise God's message is (see Ephesians 4:13, 14).

Second, the wisdom that Paul speaks is not the wisdom of this world or of its princes - the world and its leaders eventually will come to nothing; all earthly powers will pass away. But Paul speaks with a type of wisdom that does not originate within the world and is not recognized by the world and that is the Wisdom of God.

Paul rejects human wisdom so that he may proclaim the wisdom of God. God has given this hidden wisdom as a kind of mystery (v. 7). Paul's message from God is not a mystery because it is complicated or difficult to understand, but because it was kept secret until God was ready to reveal it - the plan of salvation.

3. What types of wisdom was Paul contrasting in this epistle? (vs. 5-7)

When the Jews and the Roman governor united in effecting the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, neither party to the proceeding can be said to have understood and realized what was being done. The enemies and murderers of the Prophet of Nazareth saw neither the glory of his character and person more than very dimly, nor the glory of his redemption in any measure at all. Jesus himself had declared, "They know not what they do;" and Paul here says that, had they known the counsels of God, they would not have crucified Christ. This does not justify or excuse their act; for they certainly knew that they were putting to a cruel death One who was innocent and just. Christ is the Lord of glory --The Pulpit Commentary: (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.)

4. In what way were the princes of this world ignorant of "The Lord of glory" (v. 9)?

While 1 Corinthians 2:9 is often used in reference to heaven, the context suggests that Paul was referring to the mystery of God's plan. In its original setting, the quote from Isaiah declares that no God but the Lord acts on behalf of His people (64:4). Paul's point in quoting this passage was to show that God's wise plan could not be grasped by human means. It is revealed to believers only by God's Spirit. No wonder the Greeks considered the Cross foolishness and it was a stumbling block to the Jews! Yet this was God's revealed wisdom to save the world. "The great truths of the gospel are things lying out of the sphere of human discovery. Lying out of the sphere of nature, we cannot discover them but by the light of revelation. (Matthew Henry's Commentary, Zondervan).

5. In the context of Paul's discussion, what was he emphasizing in verse 9?

The phrase "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" is difficult to interpret. Since the Greek simply reads "comparing spiritual with spiritual," the meaning is obscure. Some think it means comparing spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. Others believe that it means explaining spiritual things to spiritual men. The word translated "comparing" can also be rendered "interpreting," "combining," or "expressing." Matthew Henry's Commentary says, "Spiritual truths, when brought together, will help to illustrate one another. The Pulpit Commentary summarized says "When the human spirit receives the Divine Spirit, what a glorious enlargement of the things of God, to the domain of thought, emotion, impulse! Calmly the mind works on; its range and compass widened by a new horizon, a motive power brought to bear it never knew,

and the repose of strength deepening evermore in the peace of Christ." This interpretation is supported by verses 10,12, and is the most proper to convey Paul's meaning.

6. How should we interpret Paul's statement about "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (vs. 13)?

The "*person without the Spirit*" refers to the unconverted, who lack supernatural life and wisdom. He or she is the unbeliever who has not received the Holy Spirit. The unbeliever is walking in the flesh and not in the spirit. He or she is carnally minded and spiritually dead. If one is carnally-minded he or she is at enmity against God, is not following the law of God and therefore, cannot please God. He or she has no legitimate claim to Christ as Savior and Lord.

7. Who is the "the person without the Spirit" (vs. 14)?

As written in the earlier part of verse 14, the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because he is not spiritually connected due to being spiritually dead. A true believer in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and has a mind that is set on the things of the Spirit. He or she is spiritually alive and at peace with God having the ability of spiritual discernment. Those things which are "spiritually discerned" through illumination of the Word, the Holy Spirit provides His Saints the capacity to discern divine truth (see Ps 119:18), which the spiritually dead are unable to comprehend. (cf. John 5:37-39).

In John Ch. 5, vs. 37 - those who are spiritually dead don't have His word within them because they do not believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Since only spiritual people are able to receive spiritual truths, it follows that the man without the Holy Spirit, an unregenerate person, would not and could not receive the message of wisdom regardless of his intellectual abilities or accomplishments.

8. What does "discerned only through the Spirit." mean? (vs. 14)

The spiritual man can judge all things because they are able to judge, or discern those things that pertain to the spiritual realm as well as the non-spiritual. In contrast, unbelievers are only able to recognize Christians' faults and shortcomings; but they are not able to evaluate their true nature as spiritual people who have been transformed into the children of God because they are spiritually dead.

9. How can the spiritual man judge "all things" (vs. 15)?

The "*mind of Christ*" means to look at life from the Savior's point of view, having His values and desires in mind. It means to think God's thoughts and not think as the world thinks. We as believers are allowed by the Word and the Spirit, to know the thoughts of our Lord which means through the Holy Spirit, there will be a supernatural opening of our minds to receive the truths He unfolds. We will be able to get an understanding and see clearly the plan Christ has for our lives.

10. What is the "mind of Christ" (vs. 16)?

CONCLUSION

Recognizing Spiritual Wisdom

Our greatest goal is to receive eternal life. But recognizing and following true wisdom comes first. While the wisest philosophers disagree with each other and the greatest scientists are revised by each new generation, the wisdom from above never changes. If we are to reach the goal of true wisdom, we must not be impressed by eloquent oratory or clever intellectualism. We must recognize the power and permanence of spiritual wisdom.

The highlight of God's wisdom is the cross and empty tomb. God's plan was in His mind from the beginning, but what was revealed only partially to the Old Testament prophets becomes known more fully in the life of Jesus and the gospel proclaimed by the apostles. We must see Christ's great sacrifice not as a stumbling block or as foolishness but as a demonstration of divine wisdom and power.

Serving with Spiritual Wisdom

Paul and the other apostles revealed the truth that was given to them through the Spirit. The first-century church and its leaders accepted this truth and served God faithfully. Through the centuries the torch has been passed, and now it has come to us. Just as Paul exhorted the believers in Corinth, believers today must rely not on their own strength but on the power and wisdom of God. In that way the message and not the messenger will offer the bright beacon of light to a lost world.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as we studied a few weeks ago, Wisdom has extended us an invitation and is available for all. Thank you for your Word Lord. Let us be mindful of Wisdom's invitation so that we may take hold of Wisdom and gain an understanding of Your Will for our life. Guide our footsteps, guide our hearts and guide our thoughts so that we may not be consumed with the things of this world but that we are able to serve you in Spirit and in Truth under the guidance of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus