

I Corinthians

The Secret Wisdom of God

I Corinthians 2

Well. Good evening. It's great to be with you again tonight. I ask that you please turn with me to

I Corinthians 2 and while you're turning, let me just sort of give you a broader understanding of where we are going in the passage together tonight.

During Paul's second missionary journey, the apostle spent 18 months in Corinth preaching first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles after it started to become pretty obvious that by and large, the Jews were rejecting the message that Paul had to share. In spite of that, a church was planted, it was established, and with the passing of time after that 18 month window, Paul was able to leave Corinth, taking with him Priscilla and Aquila. They went on to Ephesus and then on to other areas. Continue to share the gospel in regions that had not you had heard. But while he was gone, trouble began brewing within the church that he loved so deeply. As Pastor Dan told us last week, he received a letter from Chloe's people. Not exactly sure who Chloe is, but the letter came and we do know what he communicated to Paul in that letter communicated some of the troubles that they were confronting. So in response to this bad report, Paul writes this first letter of this first epistle to the church in Corinth, the church that he had invested so much of his time, his energy, his heart into in the beginning days. So Paul in this letter is addressing at least five significant conflicts within the church. The first of which has to do with the division within the church, which had grown out of a party spirit. Now, when I say party spirit, for those of you that were rejoicing at a particular ballgame yesterday, I'm not talking about what happened after the game was over and time expired. That's not the type of party we're talking about. Paul was addressing partisanship within the church. The partisanship was some believe that they should follow one teacher and others believe they should follow another. They were sort of as we might say, styling and profiling, saying this teacher is more solid, this teacher is better. I follow this one. You follow that one. And it was creating a rift, a division within the church, some readily identified with Apollos, of Apollos. Apollos was a skilled orator, so it was easy for them to track with Him and his manner and delivery. Others followed.

Peter, you know that rough and ready fisherman type that they could just identify with this outdoorsman who had spent so many days with Jesus as they ministered together over Jesus public three year ministry. Still others adhered to Paul himself as the one who may likely have been the one to share the gospel with him in a way that they accepted Christ as Savior and then also was the one who had planted the church so they would have a draw to be with him or to follow him. But finally, there was a group within the church that sort of set themselves above the rest simply by saying, you can follow Apollos, you can follow Peter, you can follow Paul, but we follow Christ. So it's quite plausible that even some of his division might even have seemed reasonable. When you consider the makeup of this early church, the Jewish converts that were in the church might identify more readily with Peter, while the Gentiles would identify with the apostle to the Gentiles. The Apostle Paul, those who were highly educated, the wealthy movers and shakers of the community would identify readily with Apollos. And sadly, some I think, maybe even enjoyed pulling the piety card and like to bring out the fact that, you know, we're not going to follow men, we're going to follow Jesus. But they didn't say it in the same way that Paul did.

So Paul, as he's writing the letter, especially as we're looking at chapter two, this evening, he's now addressing that issue. He's going to say, we're going to follow Jesus, but let's follow him with humility. Let's follow him with love for each other as well as love for the one who redeemed us. So now let's look together at chapter two, if you'll follow along, beginning with verse one as I read the opening verses. And then we'll pause and continue verse one.

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. Accept Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And I speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom, but intimacy of the spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Now, if you keep your Bibles open and pause there with me for a moment, we'll come back to the passage in just a few minutes. But I want us to see, even in these first opening verses, Paul starting to close in as to what his main focus is in this passage tonight. So Paul is calling this church back to unity by asking them to remember and to consider two things.

The first thing he wants them to consider simply is this he wants them to consider his manner of preaching the gospel. When he came and preached to them. We see that in these opening five verses. Then in the rest of the chapter, Paul's also going to ask him, consider the message that I preached. So it's a straightforward outline that I think we can track with. Consider first the manner in which I came, and then consider also the message that God gave through me to you as a church. So as Paul begins, he goes right to the point, saying that his preaching of God's message was neither erudite nor filled with the wisdom of the philosophers of the day.

He says, and when I when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom. You know, it's really hard to say which the Greeks loved more. The eloquence of their favorite orators, or the philosophies which they propounded. But this had become evident to Paul. Paul, before he was in Corinth, had been in Athens, and while Paul was in Athens, he first sized up the situation of what was going on in Athens by walking around and observing it was management. By walking around, he was there to find out what is the way I should present the gospel in this particular community. As he walked around, he observed, all around this city of Athens were all kinds of altars to all sorts of gods. But then we're told that he even found one. There was an altar to the unknown God, just in case.

Maybe somehow they had overlooked some god. The Athenians do not want to be offending that God, so they had an altar to it. And that's the God that Paul then presents to the Athenians. He enters the philosophical world of thinking that they had, and he starts reasoning with them from the gospel, one of the most reasonable, well laid out sermons of the gospel we could ever look at or study together. However, even with using his very best skills and the best disciplines of logic that he has, Paul reasons with them, but sadly so many in Athens just saw him as some other babbler. He's just another speaker traveling the speaker circuit. Let's hear what he has to say. We'll consider it for a moment, and then we'll go back along our way.

And for the most part, there were a few, a handful of believers. They did trust in Jesus Christ because of Paul's efforts there. But I think as Paul left Athens, if I was in Paul's shoes, it would have been a very discouraging moment of ministry. He thought he had poured himself into that arena, a very pivotal arena

for him to reach, but with very little fruit. So now here he is in Corinth, and Paul makes it as he arrives. His only objective is to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Paul was determined to keep the main thing, the only thing. As he presented to this group of people, he preached by going through the city, committing to this course of action.

Even though this course of action was inherently filled with some significant risks. Declaring Jesus is the Christ who had been crucified was an affront to the sensibilities of all the Jews. That white might be there. I mean, what self-respecting Jew would want to hear that they collectively had missed the mark? They had missed the Messiah while he had been there among them?

Not only that, but they were culpable as a nation for putting that Messiah to death. So this would raise anger among the Jews. And to a philosophical thinker of the day, whether they were Jew or Gentile, who couldn't, who wouldn't recoil at the mention of crucifixion. We understand crucifixion, but we don't understand it. I believe quite deeply enough it was not anything that was to be heralded.

You know, we wear crosses and they're nice and they're polished because we've refined it. But in the day, the crucifixion was one of the cruelest creations of men. It was reserved for those who were who were rascals. They were they were criminals. They were thieves. They were those who were guilty of heinous crimes. They were runaway slaves. They were crucify them in order to make a spectacle of them. To the Jew, being hung on a tree was to be eternally damned. It was to be cursed. And to the Greek it was to. It was to be receiving one of the cruelest oppressions of Rome that they could give was to have someone crucified. So culturally and spiritually, Paul's choice to preach the cross with simplicity and with clarity so that anyone could understand, that would understand, was logically an unwise course of action to take.

Knowing how people typically react to any idea which confronts them, their set ways of thinking, and having just been mocked and largely rejected in Athens. I think it's no small thing that Paul now adds, I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, so Paul could well remember what had happened in his first missionary journey just some months before in Lystra.

There he preached the gospel and a crowd that wanted to herald him and wanted to give him adulation, quickly became an angry mob that took him out and stoned him and dragged him out of the city and left him for dead. Paul was consciously aware of his sense of his own weakness, and even his anxiety over his inability to accomplish the task that he believed God had called him to do.

If he were to try to do it in his own power. I think there's still one more reason to know why Paul preached in Corinth with much fear and trembling. Any time that a pastor gets up to preach, any time someone gets up to teach God's Word, it is a weighty matter. Perhaps we can understand this best by paraphrasing John Piper.

John Piper put it this way the mantle of preaching the gospel is soaked with the blood of Jesus Christ and singed with the fires of hell. I think that gives a little bit of good, context for us to understand the weight of preaching God's Word. So realizing the importance of this moment, I believe for Paul, in contrast with him knowing himself, no one ever stands and preaches God's Word without also knowing themselves and their weak spots, their failures and their vulnerabilities, their fears of that given moment. And here's Paul facing the exact same thing.

So Paul is with them, with fear, with trembling. Yet he's convinced. He's convinced of the call that God had given him, knowing that God had led him to Corinth to preach God, Paul remains committed to the course of action which God had given him to do. So while both his words and the message that they conveyed were maybe less than convincing or persuasive, if we were to judge them according to the standards of the best orators of the day, they were delivered, were told, and demonstration of the spirit and of power, so that the faith of the Corinthians might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Perhaps here I think it's a good encouragement for us all, because whenever we share the gospel with someone, whether it's someone we've been trying to reach for a long period of time a family member, a coworker, a neighbor, or just a seemingly incidental bumping into somebody with the opportunity still to share the gospel. Whenever we share the gospel, our message is to be simply Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and coming again. We know what we need to share, but the manner that we share it is to be one in which we are trusting, not in ourselves, not in our own gift package, not in our own capabilities, not in our own experience, but rather we're trusting in the Holy Spirit, living within us, speaking through us to communicate what we cannot.

We might fumble with our words a bit. We might not see everything we wish we had when we evaluate. How did that sharing of the gospel go? We may not have said it as eloquently as someone down the street. The next guy could have, but the sharing of our faith has great power as a demonstration or proof that the Holy Spirit loves to work with the cracked, cracked clay pots called people to share the gospel with others perhaps as well.

Chambers got it right when he said, there is no longer any responsibility on me to do the work. I think what he's pointing to is simply this our responsibility is to be faithful, faithful and speaking on behalf of Jesus Christ, faithful, and sharing the gospel to those who need to hear it. But it is not up to us to convince them.

And even if we could convince them by our own logical and reasoning capabilities, it would be probably futile. In the Kingdom of Heaven, ours is only to present the gospel. The work of the Holy Spirit is to give them new life. It's the Holy Spirit who takes anything that we say, anything that we preach, anything that we teach from God's Word.

Anytime we share the love of Jesus Christ with a neighbor across the street, it is the Holy Spirit who makes the Word of God alive and quicker and sharper than any two edged sword. So Paul has called the church to consider the manner in which he came. Not bold, not the guy that I saw the picture. Even though Paul was probably small, I kind of always thought Paul walked about three feet off the ground because of the great faith and the great words that he could write and communicate, and the great things that God did through him.

No, I think Paul arrived as an ordinary, humble, afraid human being. That was his manner. But he came also, trusting the power of the spirit, not himself. So now Paul can turn our attention not just from the manner in which he came to present the gospel, but he wants us to consider with the church of Corinth the message of the gospel that he preached to them.

Can I let you in on a little secret? I think that's what Paul's about to say. He's going to say something to them about a secret, the secret, or the hidden wisdom of God. So he begins to unpack the secret

wisdom of God that he wants to share, though, is no little secret at all. It's the most meaningful and significant message of greatest importance, this importance.

Then he can deliver. Look with me. Verse six. *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom. Although it's 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.* Now the opening five verses of our chapter, chapter two are actually a continuation of the closing 15 chapters of chapter one.

Since we don't have time to unpack that tonight, as a collective, I encourage you to go back and look at it. But just to give us a spark of understanding will suffice it to say that Paul has been content that human wisdom alone is insufficient as a means of becoming right with God. Yet that's far from saying that Paul discounted wisdom as a whole.

So rather, in verse six he tells us there is a wisdom. There's a wisdom which the mature or the complete understand, and it stands in contrast to the wisdom of this age or to the natural understanding of men. In fact, this wisdom so far exceeds the natural wisdom of man that it remains a secret, something hidden from there. Understand? So what is Paul really talking about? With all this piling up of words, only the mature, the complete can understand the wisdom of God. But who exactly qualifies as mature? Is he talking to those who have become believers and have walked with God forever? Is he talking to those who are believers and have just now started to walk with Jesus Christ? Is he talking to those who don't yet know Jesus Christ? I believe Paul is addressing here everyone who is a believer, whether new in between or way down the road, in their walk with God already developed deeply and growing in grace for decades, the mature are those who have received the wisdom of God, which Paul, by God's grace, has imparted to this church.

But the wisdom of this age, the philosophies of men, even though they do give wisdom and insights for understanding many complexities in life, the wisdom of the rulers or the most highly esteemed movers and shakers of the culture today. The wisdom of men, according to Paul, is already becoming obsolete and passing away the best thinking of men apart from the wisdom of God which leads to salvation, is of no value.

In the end, only those who know the secret, hidden wisdom of God truly are wise. Now, maybe you're already ahead of me, and you're thinking, maybe you realize that there's sort of a big problem, isn't there? When it comes to knowing a secret. A secret, by definition, is not known to us, and the only way that we can know a secret is to have someone let us in on it.

So much to tell us about it and explain it to us. The word secret in the original language, in the Greek language is *Mousterian*. You might even sort of recognize an English word tucked away in *Mousterian*, our word *mystery*. Some of our translations translate the word *secret*. It is a mystery. It is mysterious. The mysterious and unknown truths of God.

They are truths that cannot be known by human logic or human reasoning. In fact, we can't know them at all unless God chooses to reveal himself and what he is communicating to us. So the secret things of God are received only by faith. Faith is what opens our eyes to see. Faith is what opens our ears to be able to hear. Faith is what opens our minds to comprehend otherwise. The otherwise unknowable knowledge of God. Faith is what makes us able to receive the life giving message of the gospel. And faith

is a gift from God, so that no one can boast in their human intellect or their own capabilities. So Paul goes on now in verse eight, and he says, none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Now, whether Paul is referring to the high profile leaders of the day when Jesus was crucified or whether he's appearing, I think more comprehensively to those serving the Prince of the power of the air, the demons, and Satan himself who were gloating in triumph at the moment of crucifixion, not knowing it was actually their moment of defeat. Paul clearly lets us know if they had really known, they would not have crucified him.

The reality is, though, they did not and they could not understand the richness of the crucifixion, because as it is written in verse nine, what no high 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.

According to Charles Hodge, Paul's employing here a custom that the apostles readily they used often, in which they would refer to a passage of the Old Testament without necessarily weaving it grammatically all the way through or threading it through their thought and their comments. So Paul's here is and his intent is simply to give us a reference. He doesn't quote it, he's just referring to an Old Testament passage from Isaiah chapter 64, so that we might understand his point.

No one has heard or perceived by the ear. The mind is comprehended. We can understand not because we're brilliant, but because the Holy Spirit has opened our minds, our hearts, our eyes, to be able to see. So as the spirit reveals to us the truths of who God is, the depths of the beauty of his salvation, his love for us, that he would give his only son, so that we who are enemies of God, rebels against God, might no longer be those animation rebels, but we might be called sons and daughters of the King.

Now those things are only revealed as the Holy Spirit makes them known. And Paul tells us that because he says the spirit searches everything, even the depths of God now like to Paul graciously gives us a little bit of an illustration right now in verse 11. He adds, for who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person which is in him.

Now I can look at your faces and see the look on your faces tonight, and I, I can say this, some of you are really tracking with the things that Paul is saying. I can also probably say that a maybe more of you might be tracking with Peter, who says the things of Paul sometimes are really hard to understand, but, you know, I really don't know where you're at and how you're processing this passage of God's Word unless you tell me, because your thoughts or your thoughts, their secret, are just like my thoughts or mine. And unless I invite you in and share transparently, you can't know what I'm thinking. Well, we have an advocate. We have someone that reveals to us the mind of God. God wants to be known. You ever thought about that? Why did God create? Here's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit existing and all of eternity past.

Can't quantify it. My little mind can't even begin to wrap around it. But here is God always existing, and we call this the City of God. God lacked nothing he didn't need to create to fulfill himself. He didn't need to create in order to find happiness or to have relationship. So why did God create? He wanted to be known beyond himself.

And here we see that God is wanting to be known, and it's the Holy Spirit who takes the Word of God, the truths of God's Word. And he actually unpacks them for us. He's the one that helps us have those eyes to see and ears to hear, minds to understand, so that we are touched deep within our souls.

And our lives are transformed little by little by little into the image of Jesus Christ himself. So only God's Spirit knows the depth and the breadth and the innermost mind of God. And this is why we get some really good news for those who believe in verse 12 and 13, Paul tells us, 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. When we know Jesus Christ and when the Holy Spirit we take God's Word and we open it, we unpack it and we pray, Lord, show me what I need. It is the Holy Spirit who allows us to see the very things that we do need from His Word but the very next verse is rather discouraging news that Paul gives to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ. Paul adds in verse 14, the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he's not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The carnal, unregenerate mind which characterizes the spirit of this age. That's what Paul is talking about, can do no less than reject as foolish the simplest truths of God's Word. No one, by mere human logic or human reasoning, can find any way to be right with God. You know, when we lived in Colorado, it was interesting for us to observe so many people. We said, oh, I get close to God.

Whoever the God was, they were talking about every time I'm in the mountains. By the way, Pastor, that's why I'm not in church on Sunday. We can't get close to God by nature. We can't get close to God. Just new science. We can't get close to God through mysticism. We can't even get close to God through our own white-knuckle self.

Efforts to try to be more and do more and align ourselves with what we think a good Christian supposed to look like. We are only made right with God when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and opens our hearts to receive the engrafted word. But then in verse 15, Paul says, yet the spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

Those who by faith have received Jesus as Savior have the Holy Spirit living within them, giving them the ability to discern, to understand the precious truths of God. That's one of the reasons the Holy Spirit indwells us. We lack holiness. It's no coincidence that the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. What I lack most in need, most who indwells me.

But he's also the one who causes me to discern and understand, so that whenever I read God's Word, it becomes alive to me and to you. It doesn't become God's Word as I read it, but he illumines my heart so that I understand His Word for what it really is and what it truly says. But for those who do not have the Holy Spirit because they have never received Jesus as Savior and Lord, they cannot discern or judge rightly to them the gospel and all those who proclaim it remains incomprehensible. It's sheer foolishness, not even worth the time of their day. Paul then wants to wrap it up in verse 16. It says, for who is understood the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him so no one who rejects the word of the Lord, and the application of it to their life by the work of the Holy Spirit.

No one who does that is in any position to tell God what to do. That's Paul's point. He's driving at home. Only those who know the thoughts of God is revealed accurately to them by the Holy Spirit of God, can understand his ways, and in understanding his ways. We wouldn't dream of telling God what to do. You know, earlier we sang, the world cannot comprehend such a mystery.

Yeah, just a glimpse of Christ revealed is compelling us to sing. Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty. When the Spirit of God gives us life and we see Jesus for who he is and comprehend all that he has done for us. And when the Spirit of God illuminates the Word of God to us, so there's constantly transforming our lives, and we are ever increasingly becoming more and more like Christ in our thinking and living.

We, according to Paul in this verse, we have the mind of Christ. As we increasingly become more like him and the mind of Christ is providing the parameters, the guidepost for all of our thinking and all of our actions. Unity replaces divisiveness in the church, in our families and the workplace, and in all the arenas of our life. I think that's why Paul later would write, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind, doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. The cross in and of itself is necessarily offensive. When we confront people with the reality that they cannot get right with God and their own efforts, no matter what track they try, the only way to have peace with God is to go through Jesus who said, I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No one comes to the father except through me. When we preach that gospel, clearly people are going to resist it. It will be offensive. but the cross is not to be necessarily divisive divisions within a church over styles of teaching or ways that you lead or whatever else that you get divided in color. The carpet, whatever it is, its wreaking havoc comes from our sinful, selfish desires.

We want to have our own way instead of doing what the spirit enables us to do. And Paul is showing us tonight by the spirit, we can know the things of God. We can die to self. We can make much only of Jesus Christ. We can surrender all of our desires completely to him.

Father, we do ask that by your word and to your glory that you would help us. Paul has said so much in this passage, and we've had to hurry through it to cover the ground together tonight. But I pray that we would understand that the manner of preaching the gospel or sharing the love of God through Jesus Christ the Son is a manner, a position of humility. I can't trust in myself. I can't trust in the gift package that you might have given me. I can trust only in you. And then, Lord, I thank you that while this secret, hidden, mysterious mind of God is not known by so many, it is known to all who by faith have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. So, Lord, would you cause us to know, to understand, and to live in obedience to your revealed will for us individually, for us as a church, not only today, but tomorrow, in the next week and in all the days ahead as we continue to serve you to your glory alone will thank and praise you. In Jesus name. Amen.