

## The Spirit of God & the Mind of Christ

I Corinthians 2:6-16

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*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> 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”—*

*<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. <sup>16</sup> “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*

- I Corinthians 2:6-16, ESV

### Introduction: So, What Works, Then?

I am not mechanically inclined. Somehow, my dad can take anything apart and fix it, but I cannot. YouTube has been very helpful in enabling me to fix a few things, but I simply have no intuition when it comes to how to properly take apart, fix, or re-assemble anything mechanical. If there's a wrong way to do it, that's probably the way I'll try, again and again, before proclaiming the task “impossible”! How many times have I then been shown how to do something, and I've thought or said, “So, that's how that works! Wow! I would never have done it that way.”

Paul is writing to the church at Corinth to give them a major course correction. He's going to have to address a number of problems and questions they have, but he begins with addressing their personality-cult factions, which are driven by worldliness and, even deeper, by pride. He has been up-rooting this deep and important sin issue, working his way down to the root of pride.

So, by now, they should have realized that the church will not grow spiritually and they will not grow in Christ by imitating the world and acting out of a prideful know-it-all attitude. They don't need to find the right celebrity pastor whose impressive wisdom or demonstrations of the miraculous power of God will transform their church community and grow them all in Christ. If they've heard what Paul has said so far, they may be ready now to ask: Okay, so what works, then?

To connect back to the analogy of weeding I was using last week, once you rid your lawn of dandelions, now what? What's going to actually grow grass and help you build a healthy, green lawn? What works in the Christian life and in the life of the church? What grows believers and brings unbelievers to faith in Jesus?

The short answer to that question that Paul gives here in 1 Corinthians 2 is the Holy Spirit – more specifically, not worldly wisdom, but the wisdom of God, given by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in the Scriptures. It turns out we don't need the wisdom of the world or our pride-driven solutions because we have been given the Spirit of God and the mind of Christ.

### **A. The Wisdom of God & the Rulers of This Age**

After calling the Corinthians away from the wisdom of the world, which is unfruitful and opposed to Christ, Paul clarifies that we, as believers, do have a real and valuable wisdom:

*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. – vv. 6-8*

It is likely that when Paul refers to “the mature” here – meaning, the fully developed, the complete ones – he's engaging in some irony. The powerful speakers famous in Corinth were called Sophists, from the Greek word “Sophia,” meaning wisdom. Their arguments were sophisticated, well developed. They had been carefully crafted to be complete and to have the desired effect on their audience.

It's likely that those in the church who were dissatisfied with things and were pushing for more rhetorically dynamic speakers were speaking of the need to develop a more sophisticated and well developed approach to the Gospel and the Christian faith, and that they saw themselves as “the mature” in the church, the sophisticated, educated, enlightened, insightful, wise ones. Paul is taking on their pride and addressing it with this ironic use of the word “mature.”

Who are the mature? Well, according to Paul's definition and from God's perspective, the truly mature ones are not those who have the most sophisticated arguments but who have accepted the true wisdom, the wisdom of God, spread by the Apostles. And this is possible only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Notice in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 2, Paul was speaking of himself alone – “I, when I came to you” and so through verse 5, but in verse 6, he shifts to “we.” Who is this we? “We do impart wisdom” . . . “we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God.” Most likely, the “we” here refers to the Apostles and maybe also the Evangelists – a group that probably included Peter and Paul and Apollos – the leadership of the church, the elders perhaps.

Paul says the Apostles and Evangelists do have a message of wisdom – true wisdom – something greater than sophisticated arguments. He will unpack what this wisdom is further in this passage and throughout this letter, but first he begins by explaining what this wisdom is NOT – “*It is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this*

age, who are doomed to pass away” Instead, it is “a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages.”

The word “secular” comes from the Latin word “*secularis*,” meaning temporary, belonging to this world, as opposed to eternity. We use this word today to mean not religious. For example, in the 1971 case *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the US Supreme Court established what is now known as “the Lemon Test,” which states that all activity carried out in public schools in America must serve a legitimate secular purpose. So, students can study the Bible as literature in a literature class – for that has a secular purpose (the study of literature) – but the Bible may not be read devotionally, for that has no “secular purpose.”

Paul is saying that the wisdom of this age, which is exercised by the rulers of this age, has only secular purposes. “The scope of the imagination” – to use Anne Shirley’s phrase – is limited to the here-and-now and to things that can be seen and measured. Often Christians are accused of being narrow-minded. In truth, secularism is a very flat and very narrow worldview. It does not consider divine things, spiritual things, or eternal things.

But God has a wisdom which the secular world and secularists know nothing about. God’s wisdom is hidden from them, is a secret to them, and was prepared by God before this age and this world began. It is eternal and divine wisdom.

Then, Paul says, the surest evidence we have that the rulers of this age do not understand this wisdom is the very fact that they crucified Jesus. Jesus is the Lord of glory, and He was and is the incarnation of divine wisdom. So, what did the rulers of this age do when they got their hands on the wisdom of God in human flesh? They had no idea what to really do with Him. They had no use for Him, for He didn’t fit their secular agendas, which were driven by power, pride, profit, and politics. The crowds tried offering Jesus an earthly political office, but He just walked away, passing through the midst of them.

So, in the end, the only thing the rulers – the power brokers - of this age could do with divine wisdom was to crucify Him.

## **B. The Things God Has Prepared and Revealed**

And yet, just because the rulers of this age had no use for the wisdom of God, that doesn’t mean that God’s wisdom is in any sense empty or useless. Far from it!

*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”—*

*<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. – vv. 9-12*

What Jesus, the incarnate wisdom of God, brought to the world, He brought specifically to those who love God. For us, Jesus reveals what had never been seen or heard before and what we could never have imagined.

Very often, we hear verse 9 – one of the most quoted verses from I Corinthians – in the context of a funeral and in reference to heaven and eternity:

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who love him”*

And while this verse is certainly accurate in describing the glories of heaven, what Paul had in mind when he quoted from Isaiah 64 here is more focused on the Gospel message, the good news that Jesus brought to light when He came from heaven to earth to save us. From eternity, from before this age began, God prepared salvation for all who love Him, for all who belong to Him by grace.

From a human perspective, given only natural sight and insight, what can we make of the life of Jesus of Nazareth? Most people say something like: Jesus was a good man, who loved others and taught us to love one another. He was gentle and kind, and yet He was betrayed by one of His closest followers, was handed over to Pontius Pilate, and was brutally crucified. This shows what the world often does to good, loving people. Jesus was a martyr for love and an example of the brutal hostility of the world. In this, He is like Socrates or Joan of Ark or Abraham Lincoln. We may learn about how to love others and live well by reading His teachings – the Golden Rule and all that – but that’s about all.

Such a perspective is incomplete at best and is, in fact, a gross distortion of all that Jesus came to teach and to do. But who could look at this Jewish itinerant preacher, son of a country carpenter, hanging on a Roman cross in agony, and see the fulfillment of God’s plans and purposes for the salvation of His people? The natural perspective hears Jesus say “It is finished” on the cross and thinks, “Well, He said it. It’s all over. He lost, He tried to change people’s hearts and minds, but He lost.” What would allow someone to see the same man on the same cross saying the same words and hear instead, “It is completed! Paid in full!” and know that the great payment needed to settle the spiritual debt of God’s people had been made and the debt had been fully and finally settled.

This is why the secular perspective on Jesus chokes on the resurrection. They don’t know what to do with that part of the story, and so they reject it as wishful thinking, as a meaningless attempt to force a victory out of a sad martyr’s death.

But God prepared Jesus and sent Him into the world to reveal the heart of God and accomplish the purposes of God in a full, final, and powerful way. Jesus didn’t just teach people how to love and live better lives, He was the Word of God made flesh (incarnate), and He spoke the truth about God and His kingdom and power and purposes. He did speak tender words of love and forgiveness, but He also spoke penetrating and convicting words about our sin and our lost condition, of our need for redemption. He didn’t say He came to teach us how to live better lives of love in this world, He said He came to seek and to save the lost, and to do so by laying down His life for His sheep, as a ransom for many.

He wasn't killed on a cross because He lost. He was crucified by the powers of this age because that was His plan all along, the way He would redeem His own, and then He rose again, not in some wishful thinking postscript, but in the victory God the Father had planned for Him over sin and death and hell forever, a victory He won for all of His own.

Who are His own? Those who love Him.

Only the Holy Spirit could reveal this truth to us. Only the Spirit of God knows the innermost thoughts and plans of God. Without the penetrating insight given by the Spirit of God, we are left alone in the dark, grasping and guessing, and getting it wrong again and again.

Some people think they can figure out the ways of God by intuition or by meditation, but that's a hopeless exercise. We can't hope to begin to comprehend the ways of God unless he reveals them to us. And so "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."

### **C. The Natural Person & the Spiritual Person**

But how do we receive this Spirit and this wisdom? Here is where we need to follow what Paul says very carefully:

*<sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. <sup>16</sup> "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

I believe the "we" here, especially in verse 13, refers to the Apostles, the ones who gave the Word of God to the early church. Paul says of himself and the Apostles: "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."

God reveals His plans and purposes fulfilled in Jesus in a very specific way. We can see it at Pentecost in Acts 2, as a good illustration: God poured out His Spirit on the Apostles, and they began to testify to the truth about Jesus. People gathered to hear what was being said. Peter stood up in the power of the Holy Spirit and began to preach. He preached from the words of Scripture, speaking words given to Him by the Holy Spirit, to reveal to the gathered crowd the revelation of God's salvation in Jesus.

But what about us? We weren't there on the Day of Pentecost. Of course, neither were the Corinthians. For them, the Holy Spirit empowered and used the Apostle Paul when he came into Corinth to reveal the hidden and secret things which God prepared before the world began and which He accomplished in Jesus. The Spirit empowered Paul, who spoke words to reveal Jesus and the salvation plan of God to them.

For us today, we have the spiritual words of the Apostles and Prophets of the early church in the New Testament, and we have the Spirit-inspired words that God gave as a preparation for the coming of Jesus in the Old Testament. So, the words taught by the Spirit containing spiritual wisdom are in our Bibles.

But how does the message get from the pages of the Bible to our hearts? By the Holy Spirit, often working through human messengers who help us understand the meaning of the text. But the Spirit gave the words and the Spirit is the One who writes the words on our hearts, so that they become to us words of life.

Those of us who receive the Bible as words of life are those who are spiritual. That is, not that we are some group of meditating gurus high on a mountain, but that the Holy Spirit rests upon us and dwells within us, because we belong to God. How do we know if we're "spiritual" or "natural"? Well, the Apostle Paul gives us several key indicators here:

1. Do you love God? God has prepared these things and He reveals them to those who love Him.
2. Do you "get it"? I don't mean, "Do you understand everything in the Bible every time you read it?" That's not what God has given us, but He has given us the ability to grasp spiritual things, namely the message of salvation in Jesus. Whether you "get it" or not is something only you know, for no one knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit within that man. But we try to capture "getting it" in the first three membership questions we ask people when they join the church as members:

**1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**

**2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?**

**3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**

- Do you know who you are – apart from God's mercy, a lost and hopeless sinner?
  - Do you know who Jesus is – Son of God and Savior of sinners?
  - Do you receive and rest on Jesus alone for salvation – trusting no one and nothing else?
  - Do you sincerely desire to rely on the grace of the Holy Spirit and live life as God commands?
3. If you love God and if you "get it," you should have a real and deep hunger for the Word of God, to know the revealed will and wisdom of God.

If your answer, from the heart, is a hearty YES to these questions, then you are spiritual, for no one can really convince your heart of these truths but the Spirit of God.

And if you've tried sharing the Gospel with someone only to find frustration and failure, you need to know that you can't write the Gospel on anyone's heart. This is because the "natural man" does not accept the things of the Spirit of God and he is not able to understand them. The best arguments, the most passionate plea, the

most loving and sincere disposition – God can use all of these things, or frankly, He can save people through shoddy arguments and even misguided messages – He saves as the Spirit speaks through the Word.

This “natural man” is psychological man, for the word Paul uses for “natural” is psyche. Psychology locates all of man’s problems within his biological self – his brain – of his environment, which has shaped the patterning of his brain. It rejects the idea of the spiritual, the divine, or the eternal. It is secular. Now that doesn’t mean it has no valid insights, for this creation in this age is real and is the creation of God, and all people bear His image and are able to study it. However, it grasps only a narrow slice, and divorced from the spiritual, the divine, and the eternal, the merely natural lacks the context to give it true meaning.

### **Application: The Mind of Christ**

And now what? If the Holy Spirit has revealed these things to us, if He has written the Gospel on our hearts as only He can, what do we do now? Well, we live out the reality of what God has shown us and given us –

*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. – vv. 15-16*

“The spiritual person,” Paul says, “discerns all things.” How? Well, it’s by the same words taught by the Spirit, the same words of life that brought us to real faith in Jesus. We discern all things by the Word of God, and so we make it our life’s ambition to study the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can do this because we’ve been given the mind of Christ.

Now, some people misunderstand and abuse this passage to basically say, “I can do whatever I want and you can’t condemn my behavior, because I’m a spiritual person, and I am judged by no one. After all, I have the mind of Christ.” That kind of prideful self-reliance is NOT AT ALL in keeping with the mind of Christ or the meaning of this passage.

What did Jesus do? Did He ignore the Bible and just operate on instinct? No. He was the Word of God incarnate, but still He memorized the Bible so He could quote Deuteronomy to the devil in the desert wilderness. He prayed the Psalms from the cross in His agony, quoting Psalm 22. He said His food was to do the will of Him who sent Him, but He studied and memorized, taught and lived the written word of God as the incarnate word of God.

If Jesus needed the anointing of the Holy Spirit at His baptism and the word of God hidden in His heart in the hour of temptation, how much more do we? If Jesus submitted Himself to walk in the Word and Spirit, how much more should we, if we have the mind of Christ?

To have the mind of Christ is to love and imitate our dear Savior in His humanity, and in His humanity Jesus depended on His Father, memorized and studied the Word of God, walked in the power of the Holy Spirit, spend hours in prayer, loved others, taught and served patiently, and ultimately laid down His life for the salvation of His own. By the power of the Holy Spirit, through the word of God, we have been called to walk in His footsteps. That’s what it means to be given His mind.

So, that's how it works: Not by human ingenuity, by clever argument, by power, wealth, or social media influence, but by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, applying the Word of God to us, leading us to follow Jesus. This is how we grow and how we glorify God, as children of God and as His church, His body in this world.