

1 Cor 2:1-16 “Christ, and Him Crucified: the Secret Wisdom of God”
Isaiah 40
Psalm 90

Feb 16, 2014

“The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath (the *ruach* – the Spirit) of the LORD blows on it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.”

It’s important to see that verse 7 speaks of the “ruach” of the LORD,
because in verse 13, Isaiah asks,
“Who has measured the *ruach* (Spirit/breath) of the LORD,
or what man shows him his counsel?”
Who directs the Spirit of the LORD?

Isaiah’s answer is clear:
God alone directs his Spirit.
No one knows the secret things of the LORD except the Spirit of the LORD.
And so when the Spirit of the LORD blows –
the grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Psalm 90 uses the same language of the fading and withering of the grace.
Psalm 90, verse 12, says,
“Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”
True wisdom comes from God.

Today there is an amazing explosion of Psalm-singing.
For most of the 20th century,
it was only a small percentage of Reformed and Presbyterian churches
that emphasized the psalms.
Even when we started our psalter hymnal project 10 years ago, we were considered odd.

Today the president of Asbury Seminary (a United Methodist)
is blogging about the importance of singing the Psalms.
N. T. Wright (an Anglican theologian) has written on the importance of singing Psalms.
Everyone seems to be reawakening to the importance of singing the Word of God.

Why is this?
Isaiah 40 and Psalm 90 help us understand why.
The word of God stands forever.
If we have the mind of Christ – as Paul says in 1 Cor 2 –
then we need the word of God as fuel –
as fodder for our hearts and minds to meditate on.

Sing Psalm 90

Read 1 Corinthians 2

Introduction: Christ, Our Wisdom (1:30)

I've been looking forward to this passage for a while.

Because this passage speaks directly to our young people –
those who are wrestling with whether you are going to believe the gospel or not.

Your education has taught you to trust your eyes and your ears.

It doesn't matter whether you have been public schooled –
or Christian schooled – or home schooled.

You have been taught that you learn by seeing and hearing.

But Paul says that if you just follow what you see and hear –

if you trust only what your senses tell you –
then you will not understand the wisdom of God.

Because just as no other human knows what is in your heart – except yourself –
so also no one besides the Spirit of God knows what is in God.

And therefore, if you are going to know God,
then you need to learn from God's Spirit.

1. "Christ Crucified" – the Foundation of Faith (v1-5)

a. Not Lofty Speech or Wisdom (v1-2)

*And I, when I came to you, brothers,^[a] did not come proclaiming to you the testimony^[b] of God
with lofty speech or wisdom.*

Paul ended chapter 1 by pointing out that Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom,
but we preach Christ crucified.

And even though "Christ crucified" is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks,
it is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those who are called.

As we saw last time, God chose the weak and foolish things of the world
in order to shame the wise and powerful.

The cross is not just something Jesus did to save us.

The cross is the pattern and paradigm for the whole of the Christian life.

I've often said that any decent human being can live just as *moral* a life as a Christian.

What distinguishes you from your unbelieving neighbors and colleagues
is *not* that you are a "better person."

It is that you are characterized by the cross.

You live a cross-shaped life – a cruciform life – a life conformed to the cross of Jesus.

And so now Paul says that he did not come to Corinth with "lofty speech or wisdom."

Paul is contrasting himself with the after-dinner speakers of the Roman world.

They would use flowery language to make speeches on any number of worthless topics.

(Think of the graduation speeches made at colleges and high schools every year –
or the ubiquitous fund-raising speeches at banquets).

Paul intentionally chose *not* to be a flowery speaker.
He did not want to be thought a “clever” speaker
 (the word “wisdom” also can mean “skilled” –
 Paul is trying to avoid the image of a “skilled rhetorician” – the Sophist).
He chose a plain delivery – one that would focus on the message.

After all, if God has chosen the weak and foolish things of the world
 to shame the strong and wise;
if God has chosen the nothings of the world
 to bring to nothing those who think themselves to be something –
then lofty speech and the wisdom of this age will not work.

Paul wants his speech to take a cruciform shape.

² *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

This is a curious phrase.

What does it mean,
 “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”?
If you had asked Paul what time it was,
 would have he have said, “Christ, and him crucified!”? [No!]

The point should be clear:

while the philosophers debate many things,
and the sophists can make flowery speeches about all sorts of things,
 there is only one thing that Paul knows.
There is only *one* topic that Paul will preach:
 Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

Now, when you preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified,
 that will allow you to speak of many other things –
 but everything through the lens of Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
How does the cross change your view of marriage?
If I am called to take up my cross and follow Jesus,
 then I cannot view marriage as being fundamentally about *my* own happiness.
How does the cross change your view of sickness and death?
When I am sick and in pain, I remember the cross of Jesus –
 and the one who suffered for me –
 and so I rejoice that I am being conformed to his likeness!

Everything must be seen in the light of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

b. “In Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power”: Paul’s Preaching (v3-5)

³ *And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,*

And so Paul says that he came in weakness and in fear and much trembling.

He did not come to Corinth in a strong position.
He came in “fear and trembling” –
not as a philosopher with the patronage of the wise and powerful –
not with “the confident self-promotion of the sophist” (AT 213).
He intentionally chose a weak position in imitation of the Christ he preaches.

⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men^[c] but in the power of God.

What does Paul mean by “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”?

Many people have thought that Paul is talking about miracles,
but look at the grammar of the sentence:
“my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom,
but *my speech and my message were* in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”
If Paul was saying that miracles were the ground of their faith,
then that would be to say that the Jews were right to look for signs!

But Paul’s whole point in chapters 1-4 is to establish the centrality of the cross.

Their faith does not rest on Paul’s ability to perform miracles!

Their faith rests in the power of God.

And Paul has been saying that the power of God is the good news –
the gospel message – of the *cross* of Jesus Christ.

1:17 – “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,
and not with words of eloquent wisdom,
lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

1:18 “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

1:24 “but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Paul does not want the faith of the Corinthians to rest in “plausible words of wisdom”
but their faith rests in the demonstration (the proof) of the Spirit and of power.

The language used in these verses is the language of debate, persuasion, and evidence.

And Paul is very emphatic.

The *proof* (the demonstration) is given by the Holy Spirit.

As Thiselton says it,

“Paul determines to let truth speak for itself,
confident in the power of the Holy Spirit of God
to bring this truth home to the hearts, minds, and wills of the hearers” (AT 220).

In other words, I *cannot* persuade you of the truth of the gospel.

Persuasion belongs to the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I do not offer wise and persuasive words.

I simply proclaim the message of the gospel.

Paul will not use gimmicks.

He will preach the truth of the gospel,
confident that the Spirit of God will persuade people.

(As Jesus said to Paul in a vision when he was in Corinth in Acts 18:9,
“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,
for I have many in this city who are my people.”)

If *Jesus* is the one who persuades by *his Spirit*,
then my task is to declare his word.

Brothers and sisters, you and I are not the Holy Spirit!

We can't change anyone! (we're not even any good at changing ourselves!)

But, for those who are mature – for those who have the Spirit of God –
we do impart wisdom.

2. The “Mind of Christ” – the Spirit Who Is from God (v6-16)

a. The Secret Wisdom of God: the Cross (v6-8)

⁶ *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom,*

And if you think about what Paul has said in chapter 1, this makes sense.

Paul has contrasted the wisdom of this age with the wisdom of God.
So obviously there *is* a wisdom that Paul endorses!

And so, for those who have *believed* the message of the gospel,
there is a proper emphasis on wisdom:

*although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.
⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our
glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have
crucified the Lord of glory.*

When Paul calls this a “secret and hidden wisdom,”
he is using the language of “mystery.”

A *mysterion*, for Paul, is something that was *once* hidden,
but now has been revealed.

In this case, the mystery – the secret wisdom of God –
is the wisdom and power of the cross.

God had decreed the cross (“Christ, and him crucified”) before the ages.

The word here is the word translated “predestine” or “fore-ordain.”

And God had decreed before the ages that the eternal Son of God – the Lord of Glory –
would be crucified for us – “for our glory.”

Indeed, Paul's reference to Jesus as the Lord of Glory

reminds us that God's purpose in the cross
is that we might be made partakers of his glory –
through our sharing in his cross!

And Paul says that in all this, the rulers of this age failed to understand God's purposes.
The "rulers of this age" certainly include the Jewish and Roman authorities –
and the principalities and powers – every power arrayed against Jesus!

Pilate and Herod thought that the crucifixion would get rid of Jesus.
Satan filled Judas Iscariot in order to betray Jesus and send him to the cross.
Plainly Satan did not recognize "the Lord of Glory."
Because in fact, the crucifixion of Jesus only served to enthrone him
at the right hand of the Father.
And therefore, the rulers of this age are doomed to pass away.

Now, I want you to pay attention to the "rulers of this age" here in verse 6,
because we'll hear about the "spirit of the world" in verse 12.
The rulers of this age and the spirit of this world are intimately connected.
There is an entire way of thinking and knowing and living
that is bound up with this age.
It may take different forms at different times.
The Stoicism of Rome – the Confucianism of China –
the Enlightenment of Europe –
the postmodernism of today –
all take different forms,
but all share in the spirit of the world,
and all follow the rulers of this age.

Kingdoms come and kingdoms go.
Philosophies rise and philosophies fall.

And the rulers of this age continue to overlook and forget about King Jesus,
because the spirit of this world is hostile to the Spirit of God.

b. The Source of Our Knowledge: the Spirit of God (v9-11)

⁹ *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" —

Many have puzzled over the source of this quotation.
The language appears to be drawn from Isaiah,
but I'm not sure that thinking about Isaiah's context
will help us understand what Paul is doing.
Because Paul is talking to the Corinthians about *their* context.
They live in a world in which Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.

How do the Greeks seek wisdom?

Plato and Aristotle had agreed that the knowledge of the senses
is the foundation on which we build our ideas.

The Greek quest for wisdom arises from the heart of man
and is conducted through the eyes and ears.

Your eyes and your ears are your primary means for gathering information.
You see and you hear and you develop opinions, beliefs, and knowledge.

But Paul says that this is *not* the way that we learn the wisdom of God.

If you want to learn about the natural world, use your senses.

If you want to learn about your own heart, use your own spirit.

How can you learn about God?

What has God prepared for those who love him?

Your senses cannot help you.

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ 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.

How do you know someone's thoughts?

When you are in love – you have this eerie moment when you realize
that you have no access to the inner world of this person that I love –
except by what she tells me.

So how do you *know* God's thoughts?

After all, no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

If you want to know God – if you want to know what God thinks –
then you need to learn from the Spirit of God.

And, in verses 12-13, Paul says that the Spirit is our teacher.

c. So How Do We Know? Word and Spirit (v12-13)

It appears that the Corinthians were getting all “spiritual.”

They were interested in “secret wisdom” – “being spiritual”.

How often have you talked to someone who has abandoned Christianity
but still holds on to “spirituality”?

Paul says that “being spiritual” amounts to nothing

apart from “the message of the cross in your innermost being.” (AT 259)

The secret wisdom of God “can be apprehended *only* as his Holy Spirit shows you Christ.”

And so, Paul says, 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.

Many in the Greco-Roman world had spoken of a “world-soul” – or an animating spirit – some divine principle that permeated everything.
Paul’s contemporary Seneca wrote, “Reason is nothing else than a part of the divine spirit sunk in a human body.” (quoted in AT, 261)

Paul says that *not* everyone is spiritual.
Human wisdom – the spirit of the kosmos –
cannot attain to divine knowledge.
The truly “spiritual” person is a person taught by the Holy Spirit.

Too often we just blow past this idea of the “spirit of the world.”
The spirit of the world is not just a meaningless term.
The spirit of the world is the way in which the world understands itself apart from God.

Many of you have seen this.
Many of this have felt this!
You *want* to believe –
but you are so caught in a web of other beliefs and practices,
that no amount of persuasion works.
Paul would say, “Of course! You are still listening to the spirit of the world.”

But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God!
The message of the cross is that all the vague spirituality of the world is a lie!
The spirit of the world does promote a certain sort of “brotherhood” –
the brotherhood of those who would set themselves up against God.

¹² *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.*

The Spirit who is from God enables us to understand the things freely given us by God.
The cross of Jesus is the crux of history.
God has overthrown the rulers of this age – he has established his Son at his right hand.

The gospel entails nothing less than an entire transformation from death to life –
from darkness to light –
and to disengage from the spirit of the world
you must *relearn* everything.
The message of the cross means a reorientation of *everything*.

The way that you read and interpret the world must change.

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

Notice that in verse 13, Paul insists upon the importance of *words* taught by the Spirit.
But the only way that we can understand spiritual truths is if we are spiritual people.

And this is the distinction that Paul makes in verses 14-16:

d. The “Soulish” Man and the “Spiritual” Man (v14-16)

¹⁴ *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him,*

I do need to quibble with the translation “natural person.”

The word here is “psuchikos” – which is related to “psuche” – soul or life.

So you could translate it “the soulish person” or “the living person” –
but it simply does not mean “natural.”

As Paul will say later, in 1 Cor 15,

when God created Adam, he became a “living soul.”

but when Jesus rose from the dead, he became a life-giving Spirit.

Paul’s point is to contrast the “psychical” (the “soulish”) with the “pneumatic” (spiritual).

The person characterized by “soul” does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.

I understand why they translate it “natural” here.

Ever since the fall, our “souliness” has become corrupt.

But our folly is *not* natural!

Sin and death are *not* natural!

Nature is something good – something that God made –
and Paul always uses the word “nature” in a positive sense.

The problem is that we traded in the Spirit of God for the spirit of this age.

We refused to interpret the world according to God’s Word and Spirit,

and instead we listened to the serpent –

we listened to the rulers of this age – the spirit of the world –

and we developed a brotherhood of rebellion against God.

And therefore, we have an entire way of thinking and knowing and doing
that is hostile to God –

so that when we hear God’s Word,

we think that the message of the cross is foolishness.

And so, the soulish man – the man characterized by the spirit of the world:

and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

You can only understand the things of the Spirit

if you have the Spirit of God.

Again we see Paul making a sharp distinction between “us” and “them.”

In verses 6-9, Paul distinguished between the “rulers of this age” and “those who love God”

In verses 11-16, Paul distinguishes between “the soulish person” and “the spiritual person,”

those who have received the spirit of the world,

and those who have received the Spirit of God.

And Paul concludes in verses 15-16:

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

Now, you might be wondering, “but how is it fair that God only gives the Spirit to some?”

Paul is not concerned about that question.

After all, as chapter 3, verse 1, points out,

Paul’s point is that the Corinthians do not deserve to be addressed as Spiritual!

Each of the Corinthian factions is bragging that *we* are the Spiritual ones.

And Paul says, *No you are not.*

It’s true, the spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

That’s absolutely right!

Because the Spiritual person is led and guided by the Spirit of God.

And the Spirit of God leads into truth and wisdom and love and righteousness!

So if you are divided among yourselves – and *Christ* is not divided! –

then you do *not* have the mind of Christ!

You’ve got the spirit of the world!

In chapter 1, verse 10, Paul had said,

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you,
but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

What is that “same mind”?

Now, in 2:16, he says, “we have the mind of Christ.”

Or as he will say to the Philippians,

“Let that mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus

(or that is yours in Christ Jesus),

who, though he was in the form of God

did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped,

but made himself nothing,

taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”

The cross is to shape the way you think – the way you know –
the way you live – the way you love.