

The Cross and the Holy Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading is from 1 Corinthians and 2nd chapter. This is Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth on page 1145 of the Church Bible.

And we begin at verse 16, sorry, verse 6 of chapter 2. Verse 6 of chapter 2. God's wisdom revealed by the Spirit.

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. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it's written, what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what no human mind has conceived, the things that God has prepared for those who love him, these are the things that God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them?

[1 : 4 0] In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 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.

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.

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.

The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?

But we have the mind of Christ. Thanks be to God. Good morning, St. Silas. My name is Martin Ayres.

[2 : 5 6] If we've not met, I'm the lead pastor here. It's great to see you, and it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Corinthians chapter 2 on page 1145 if you're using a church Bible.

Thanks, Malcolm, for reading that for us. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful. It's our regular diet as a church, our regular pattern that we'll preach through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, just taking the next bit each week as it comes, so that we're letting God set the agenda, and we're looking to just bring out what's already there in the Scriptures for us.

And it's our conviction that that way God will speak to us and give us what we need. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, as we've heard in our reading, we are conscious that without your Spirit's help, we cannot know you.

And without knowing you, we cannot make sense of your world or of who we are. So we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. And we ask, Holy Spirit, will you be at work in our minds now, opening our minds to your word, our hearts to your voice.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the more unlikely news stories this week, I don't know if you saw it, was about Aidan Rowan, who lives near Oxford. He got struck by lightning while sitting in his living room, playing on his PlayStation at 10.30 at night.

[4 : 27] He's playing on his PlayStation, he heard a loud crack, and he felt a heavy sensation in his body. It took him about a minute to come to his senses, and he realized he had searing heat in his right arm, and he could smell burning.

And so he went to hospital where the doctors surmised that he'd been struck by lightning, and they waited for his erratic heart rate to calm down, and he was discharged.

But scientists said that because of the hot weather that they've had so much in the south of England, the ground's very hard, and so as the rain had fallen, it had led to just huge puddles outside, and lightning will have bounced off a puddle through the window and struck the guy by lightning while playing on his PlayStation.

An extraordinary event. As we turn to this chapter of 1 Corinthians, we hear that for any of us to come to know with true knowledge the living God, the God who is there, something far more extraordinary than that has to happen.

The writer Paul explains that it requires a supernatural event, not just improbable, but supernatural, that the Spirit of God has to break into our lives and transform us, that we would know God.

[5 : 41] And without Him, we can't accept the things of God, but with His help, we become wise. And that miracle that it requires of the Holy Spirit breaking into our lives happens every day all around us.

It's miraculous what's going on. Just a reminder, we're looking at this letter, 1 Corinthians, so written by the Apostle Paul, an early church leader, an eyewitness of the risen Lord Jesus, writing to a church that He planted in Corinth, this prosperous Roman city.

And the big idea that Paul is addressing in this little section is wisdom. The Corinthians in this city, Corinth, were enchanted by wisdom.

They loved the idea of getting wisdom for life. And when they talked about wisdom, what they were talking about was a kind of philosophy of life, a way of thinking about the world that would make sense of the world and help you to flourish in the world.

How do you live wisely? How do you get wisdom for life? They were wisdom groupies. And so when they heard that somebody, whether it was a leader out there in the media or it was a leader in their church, when they thought maybe they've got the wisdom, they'd hang on to them.

[6 : 53] They were like groupies for them. And Paul wants to reassure them and reassure us this morning as we're listening on this letter that true wisdom to flourish in the world is not something that you will find out there in the world somewhere from some guru.

In chapter 1, verse 18, we heard that we can only be made right with God, forgiven, with hope of heaven. We can only be made right with God through a message that the world will tell you is very foolish.

Chapter 1, verse 18, he says, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

So it's an unimpressive message to the world, and yet it saves you by God's power. And then last week we heard that it saves unimpressive people.

It was a very humbling week last week. As we look at verse 27, we looked at last week, Paul says in verse 26 of chapter 1, not many of you were wise or influential when you were called.

[7 : 58] Verse 27, when you look at the people God chooses for his community, the church, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

And God wants it just like that so that verse 29, no one may boast before him. So this unimpressive message saves unimpressive hearers, and it comes through unimpressive messengers.

So Paul describes his own ministry in chapter 2, verse 2. He says in verse 1 that he didn't have eloquence or human wisdom, and verse 2 he says, I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It's unimpressive, the hearer, the people who hear it and are saved by it, and the message itself. And the natural question we should be asking at that moment is, does that mean that if I trust Jesus, I'm to be a fool for the rest of my life?

You know, that I can trust Jesus that I'll have life to the full after I die or when he returns, but until then, I'm going to be foolish and I'm going to struggle and everyone else around me is going to keep on moving on and moving up in life and I'm going to be left behind, a fool with Jesus.

[9 : 17] And Paul anticipates that question with the reading we've got this morning. Look at verse 6. He says, we do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature.

And when he mentions the mature there, it's obviously a favorite word of the Corinthians, but when he says mature in verse 6, what he's describing there is just anyone who has come to trust in the message of the cross.

Any Christian is mature in this category that Paul and the apostles speak a message of wisdom to them. And we're going to hear about that wisdom this morning. Three points. It's a glorious wisdom.

It's a revealed wisdom. It's a transforming wisdom. So our first point is this. It's a glorious wisdom from the Spirit that stretches beyond this age. So Paul describes the wisdom in verse 6.

Let me read that again. 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. And then he shows us how much better this wisdom is than the wisdom that the world could offer you.

[10 : 22] Any wisdom that you could find in the world. First of all, he explains that it's ancient wisdom. Look at verse 7. We declare God's wisdom a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

Isn't that extraordinary? So the wisdom that people follow in our world today is incredibly now-ish. We have fads. There's always the latest thing that you need to keep up with to keep up with the world.

And we get snobbish about wisdom from the past. We think, oh, well, people in the past, they didn't know anything. We're the experts now. And we have these fleeting fashions of wisdom. But Paul reminds us that the message of the cross, of Christ crucified, God destined that message for us before time, before the universe was made.

And it's glorious because it's everlasting. It speaks to every person in every culture, in every age, every time and place. And Paul says in verse 7 that it's a mystery that has been hidden.

And when he talks about that, he's not saying that it's still hidden or it's still a mystery. What he means is that it was a mystery and now it's been revealed.

[11 : 38] The writings of the prophets of the Old Testament, there's a mystery to them. In fact, the apostle Peter in 1 Peter chapter 1 says that the prophets themselves, as the Spirit inspired them to make these predictions about this suffering servant who would come and rescue the world and this conquering king who would come.

They searched intently, they yearned to know about the times in which they were speaking and the person they were speaking of. And even angels longed to look into what was going on.

But now that Christ has come, that Jesus has lived and died for our sins and risen to rule and ascended to heaven, it's as though the writings of the New Testament about him, they give us a lens through which you read the Old Testament and the mystery is revealed.

And we see that it was all about him all along. The one who would suffer for sins and rise to rule. So it's a glorious wisdom because it's from ages past and it's now revealed.

And it's a wisdom that will last forever. It concerns our future glory with Jesus. So Paul reminds us in verse 6 that the rulers of this world can't be that wise because end of verse 6, they're coming to nothing.

[12 : 58] You get wisdom from this world to live by, it won't save you for eternity. It's coming to nothing. And in verse 8, he says, the rulers of this age didn't understand God's wisdom for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The one who will reign forever on this world when he puts it right was killed by the people that this world thought were wise. And it was promised that the world could never know God's wisdom.

If you have a look at verse 9, he quotes from the prophet Isaiah 700 years before when he said, 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.

These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. In other words, now, through the apostles, Paul and the other apostolic writers, through the pages of Scripture as we have them, God is willing to reveal these glorious things to us that no one could ever have conceived of.

That chapter in Isaiah that he's quoting is about the news that God was going to come into the world and rescue people who were waiting for him. And he's saying, no eye could have ever seen that, no mind could have conceived of a God like that.

[14 : 22] And now these things are revealed to us in our times. Wisdom from the Spirit. And folks, I think the big implication of this first point for us is that we should value God's wisdom and not be too troubled by the wisdom of this world.

I don't know where you go to get wisdom for life. There is wisdom we can pick up all around us and God in his grace is gracious to all people. So it's not that nothing else is of value, but we can become so preoccupied with trying to get wisdom from the world.

And there's lots of wisdom on offer to try and help people make sense of the world without reference to God. One article in my newspaper this week was entitled Why We Are All Anxious All of the Time.

And it defined anxiety as an intolerance towards uncertainty and said that we all feel like that right now. Anxiety is such a hot topic.

And the world around us feels so uncertain, doesn't it? Think about Putin's war and the change of prime minister here and the budget this week and energy bills and a new monarch and there are changes for lots of us just in life situations as we move to new places or our kids move into new situations.

[15 : 47] But we're not going to be able to think wisely about all of that or live wisely without reference to the unchanging God who is there. I wonder for those of you who are in high school where youth turn for wisdom there are offers for wisdom everywhere.

And I was in two different schools this week where there's wisdom on the walls all around. I think that's quite common in schools these days that there will be statements on the wall pithy statements that people hope you'll read that inspiring people have said and that might inspire you to live well in the world.

Or maybe you have someone on social media or YouTube an influencer and you watch their lives and you think they're wise they seem to sort of make sense of the world and you admire them and want to listen to them.

For any of us as Christians we can be left looking at the way friends around us live or colleagues and think you know am I missing the silver bullet here? I get that Jesus will give me life to the full after the grave but how do I get life to the full in the real world now?

What difference will it make? And so you go looking and you can find TED talks that help you stop procrastinating because they'll say that's the biggest problem in our world making us unwise.

[17 : 10] Or you find that people say mindfulness coloring is what you really need to get your life together. or if only you can learn the Japanese art of decluttering and simplify.

This month my newspaper told me it's all about breathing better now. Breathing better I am literally told can transform my life. There are books on the subject now high in the best sellers charts.

One is called Breathe. Another is called Breathe In, Breathe Out. Some of you may be reading these. Still another writer was even called in my newspaper the hyperventilation messiah.

Okay? So this is going to save me. The language of salvation is being attributed now to breathing experts. I'd never heard of it until this month. And folks no wonder were anxious because I find myself thinking if I've managed to get to my age and all these years I could have solved problems in my life if only I'd known that breathing was my problem.

What else am I missing? What's it going to be next that I realize I've missed all along? And then maybe we start thinking you know I need a sermon series on this. You know I need a sermon on breathing.

[18 : 21] I need one on mindfulness coloring. One on money management. I need something on decluttering. How do I live in this age of change? And here in God's word we get assured that when we come to the cross of Christ this message that seems so foolish the Holy Spirit reveals for us everlasting wisdom from God.

It was hidden for ages past. It was conceived by him before time began and now it's freely available to us. God had prepared it in sending Jesus and he's prepared our future glory and he reveals it to us.

Isn't that extraordinary? So how do we get it this wisdom? Well that's our second point. It's a glorious wisdom. Secondly it's a revealed wisdom. A revealed wisdom by the Spirit that the world could never find.

He sets out for us this four stage process to get the wisdom of God and at each point without the Holy Spirit we would be in the dark. Any one of the processes is missing.

We are left in the dark. The first step is that the Spirit knows. So look at verse 10. These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things even the deep things of God.

[19 : 42] For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? If I was to ask you what am I thinking of right now you don't know do you?

If you've never met me you're going to struggle to guess what I would be thinking of right now. If you know me reasonably well you might make an educated guess about what I might be thinking.

Some of you would think he'll be thinking about the church's fantasy football league. Or if you're on the vestry you'd be thinking he'll be thinking about the gas prices. You could make a guess but you wouldn't really know because only I know what I'm thinking.

And the point here is that Paul's making is you can't know unless it's revealed. And yet your spirit knows what you're thinking. And the same is true when it comes to God that the thoughts of God are hidden from us but his spirit knows them.

And so verse 10 is such good news that the spirit searches all things even the deep things of God. He knows God perfectly. And then the spirit knows the second step is the spirit reveals in verse 13.

[20 : 54] This in other words what the spirit knows of God 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.

So the Holy Spirit did that for Paul and the first apostles. He gave them the he revealed to them spiritual realities and gave them the spirit taught words to write those down and to communicate them to others.

Jesus in John chapter 16 says it's one of the most extraordinary things he says Jesus that he says it's for your good that I'm going away. It's for your good that I'm going away.

Why is it for our good that Jesus would leave us? Because he'll send the spirit and he assures his followers the spirit will remind you of everything I've said so that then the apostles can reveal those truths to us.

And for us today this is how we come to know God as the spirit reveals him through what the apostles taught and as our teaching is grounded in that so as we teach one another spiritual realities with spirit taught words as we speak of the Bible to one another or we're involved in word ministries in church life our ministry derives from the spirit's revelation.

[22 : 16] So that's our second stage the spirit knows and then the spirit reveals. But even then we need a further step which is that the spirit illuminates. So have a look at verse 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.

So without the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers we wouldn't be able to understand what the spirit has revealed and we need the spirit's help to receive it.

The revelation is there whether or not we can make sense of it and the spirit is what we need to make sense of that. It's a bit like if you imagine a stained glass window or you picture a stained glass window there's one behind the screen if you imagine a church a stained glass window and you're on the outside of the building and it's a sunny day and it's dark inside you look at the window and it just looks dark.

You can't make any sense of it. But if you were to walk into the church building and then look at the window from the inside with the sun shining in to a dark building suddenly it would be so enlightening.

[23 : 34] It'd be vivid and colorful and you'd see everything. The window hasn't changed but you've changed. You've moved position. And the Bible is like that for us as the message of the cross is revealed in the scriptures in the Bible.

The Bible whether or not we can read it like this the Bible is the sword of the spirit. It's the word of God living and active sharper than a double edged sword.

Without the spirit's help in us it's dead to us. Just words on a page. When the Holy Spirit is at work in you suddenly it's dazzling.

It's the living word. God is speaking to you by his spirit. You hear his voice. And when we hear that that's the work of the spirit here it's good for each of us to ask have you had that experience when you've come to the Bible?

How are you finding it reading the Bible? Do you find that you still read it just as historical words? Or have you had that sense that can only be given by the spirit that this is God speaking to you that this is communion with God as God speaks by his spirit about his son to make you wise?

[24 : 50] Someone in our church here a committed member of our church I didn't get her permission to say again who it was but she said from the front here before explaining how she came to know Jesus that it was a sermon on this passage of the Bible that was the key day she turned to Christ because she felt that for all she'd heard she wasn't things weren't coming together and then as she realized from God's word here that spiritual things are spiritually discerned and she needed the spirit's help that she turned to God and asked for the spirit to enlighten her and open her eyes and he did that any of us could do that today if you think this is describing something here that you've not experienced let me ask would you have the faith and the humility to pray?

it could be a prayer something like gracious God if you are there would you send the Holy Spirit into my life to make yourself known to me so that I can hear you speak through your word and come to know you we need the spirit's work and that's how he works he knows he reveals he illuminates and that means that all along some people will hear the message about the cross and reject it and others will be transformed by it so that's our third point we've heard it's a glorious wisdom it's a revealed wisdom thirdly it's a transforming wisdom a transforming wisdom through the spirit that the worldly can't accept let's pick things up again in verse 14 verse 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

I don't know if you've ever had the experience of that I think of a friend coming to church with me hearing a talk all about the grace of God available freely for everyone who turns to God and at the end asking him what did you think and he said yeah yeah it was good it's all just about being a better person isn't it and I'm thinking to myself how on earth could you have heard that and conclude that that it's about improving yourself after the talk we've just heard but it's because spiritual things can only be discerned by the spirit at work in our lives we need the spirit's help and it's not just about understanding in our heads in verse 14 the person without the spirit finds what comes from the spirit of God unacceptable in other words a key work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not to make God's revelation simple but to make God's revelation desirable naturally because of our sin our hearts are like stone when it comes to God we can't accept him but the spirit opens our hearts so that we accept

God's revelation because suddenly we see here is true beauty here is true wisdom and power and the result is that we can then make good judgments about all things so in verse 16 he says that sorry verse 15 verse 15 the person with the spirit makes judgments about all things but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments merely human judgments about us if we've come to know God will be negative when you live out a cross-centered life the kind of life the kind of life Paul is calling us to in this letter 1 Corinthians you will look foolish to someone who is worldly wise because you'll break loads of their rules about living well in the world life without the spirit is about living for the moment without the spirit we're cut off from God and we look to fill the hole with things in this world and we think this world is all there is so how can we live wisely in this world where the pattern

God sets before us is to live a cross-centered life now knowing that Jesus rose and one day we'll have resurrection bodies with him forever it's when we know God through the word of the cross that we can live wisely and in verse 16 Paul ends the section doing something really bold he says who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him and the amazing thing there is that Paul is quoting there Isaiah chapter 40 where that question is asked as God promises to rescue his people and when he asks that question the obvious answer is no one who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him no one but Paul uses it here to say now when we come to Christ by the spirit we have the mind of Christ so we can know the mind of the Lord it's an extraordinary privilege so folks this is a passage to reassure us that we can be wise not through chasing after the world's wisdom but by depending on the Holy Spirit through the Bible's revelation of the cross of Christ notice the way here that the Holy Spirit and his work and the word of God and the cross of Jesus are all right together sometimes you can be looking for a church and think you've got to choose as though people characterize there's some churches that are spirit churches and other churches that are word churches here we see that those things have to go together the spirit filled church would be a church where people are dependent on the spirit and they are word centered and they're cross centered the message of the cross through the word by the spirit making us wise and knowing that should drive us to prayerful dependence on God as his people remembering without his spirit's help we're in the dark it doesn't matter how competent we feel we've become at Bible reading techniques it doesn't matter how competent we think our small group leader is or who the big name

[31 : 13] Christian speaker is that we listen to online we need the spirit revealing illuminating work so will we pray expectantly and dependently would you pray as you prepare yourself to come into church on a Sunday will you pray as you serve God in all kinds of different ways open in the Bible in youth ministry in children's ministry midweek fellowship groups Friday night live pray that the spirit will be at work in all these places so that we and the people we speak to can grow in glorious revealed transforming wisdom let's pray for that now let's pray together we praise you

Holy Spirit for your work in revealing the deep things of God to us through the message of the cross we thank you for the invitation to depend on you we're sorry that often our prayerlessness reveals a sense of self-dependence and pride we ask that you will make us wise and that we would grow in our knowledge of the word of the cross and as we come to the Lord's table now we ask that you will strengthen our faith in Christ's finished work help us to see him clearly as we share bread and wine together and to grow in our confidence of future glory demonstrated by his rising again would you be at work as we continue to meet today and in the days to come reveal to us as you've promised what no eye has seen what no ear has heard and what no mind has ever conceived as you give us the mind of Christ amen proposition remember 1991 is the mind of Christ what no has heard equine and what no one

Jesus will do and what I have for no the■■■■ what no truth is humility beam big lo no the■■■■ the things my