

# The Spirit of Wisdom

## 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

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Navajo Indians communicated coded messages during WWII for the U.S. Army. A son of missionaries who spoke Navajo fluently had suggested the idea to the Army and they accepted. Navajo grammar is complex, and at the time, only 30 non-native speakers could speak Navajo. So, it became a virtually unbreakable code. At one time, there were around 300 code-talkers who could pass information to each other much faster than the code machines of the time. Looking back, we can see poetic justice being done. There were the Nazis, wiping out racial minorities to unify their nation, and there were the Allies, using the language of a single racial minority to defeat them. What if I told you that a very similar thing occurs with God's Word? God's Spirit communicates coded messages to us in a different kind of War. And, He does so by means of God's Word, which is as undecipherable to those who hate God and his people, as those Navajo messages were to those Nazis who hated racial minorities and sought their destruction. Without the work of the Holy Spirit softening our hearts so we might love, understand, and receive the Word of God, we simply cannot understand what God is telling us. This is the wisdom of God and it is the power of God. Today we will see 3 things about this powerful divine wisdom:

1. God's Wisdom, and not man's wisdom, produces true faith.
2. God's Wisdom appears upside down to the world because the world is upside down.
3. God's Wisdom is revealed by God's spirit to those who have God's spirit.

### **1. God's Wisdom, and not man's wisdom, produces true faith**

*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (1 Corinthians 2:1)*

Greek history is rich with stories, poems, philosophy and mythology. You may have heard of Hercules or Homer's Iliad. Some of these stories have been made into movies. You may have heard of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, since in the West they appear regularly in basic history courses. But I wonder if you have ever heard of Gorgias, Prodicus or Hippias. These men were Sophists. Sophism

began in the 5th century BC and was at least, in part, about speaking with eloquent wisdom or getting paid to train people to speak eloquently. The Greek word for wisdom is Sophia, where Sophism gets its name. Their eloquent use of language was used for politics and for defending oneself in court. These Sophists created a culture of persuasive public speaking that had lasted a very long time. In the end, the effects of this culture of human wisdom and eloquence had the Corinthians confusing Paul, Apollos and Cephas with traveling persuasive speakers. For Paul had come with something like a speech, and so had Apollos and Cephas. It seemed the Corinthians just assumed that like the great speakers of their culture, Paul was just another speaker, and each man could have his favorite. But Paul lovingly corrects them and basically says: "I did not come like a Sophist with manipulation tactics. I was not trying to win a public speaking contest, or earn your praise and adoration!" In verses 2-5, He clearly lets us know his motive and strategy.

***For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:2-5)***

He was weak and trembling, not amazingly confident. His words were not believable because of his eloquence. He was preaching the worship of Christ, the God who died on a Roman cross. Not only that, Paul was saying that the crucifixion of this Jewish rabbi was the most important event in the history of the universe. What the Corinthians had experienced then was obviously not Paul's public speaking abilities, but God's power on behalf of God's "foolish" message. Their faith was, in fact, a miracle. But Paul is careful here because he wants them to know that even though the Gospel may seem foolish to many, it really is God's wisdom.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he replied: ***"Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"*** (Matt. 4:4). And prophetically, the key to how our Lord survived all the remaining temptations he faced would be the same: by the Word of God. And so, in part, what our Lord teaches us here is that man is more than just a physical being. He is also spiritual and needs spiritual nourishment to live. If we are not careful, in these modern times, we will get into the flow of the culture and forget that man actually needs God's word to live! There is a spiritual world with spiritual realities. If we live only in the physical, we will miss the activity of God. We will live as humans, only seeing and giving credit to humans. But Paul saw beyond this, with spiritual eyes. He believed in the spiritual realm and he also knew God's Gospel changed hearts. He believed in more than he could see, and so he challenged the Corinthians to look not to the eloquence of the messenger, but to the power of the message. It was the Gospel that had supernaturally changed their lives.

## **2. God's Wisdom appears upside down to the world because the world is upside down**

***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. 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.” (1 Corinthians 2:6-9)***

Up to this point, Paul has clearly stated that the wisdom of God in the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But that does not mean that there is not a message of wisdom to share. There is, but it is a wisdom that is hidden from the world. And the reason it is hidden is because the world's thoughts are not God's thoughts. The High Priest, the Sanhedrin, and the common people thought it was wise to eliminate Jesus. They wanted to kill Jesus because they thought God would send their Messiah as a conquering King that would fulfill their immediate desire to be freed from Roman rule and give them the rule. But Jesus was not offering them that. Jesus was actually doing the opposite. He was stirring up the people to abandon the Jewish rulers and follow him. He was also threatening to make Roman rule more oppressive for them. How then could he be their Messiah? He couldn't possibly be, so it was best to kill him. That was their wisdom.

The wisdom Paul preached was from God, and it was, and still is, an upside-down message to the people of this world, because their thoughts were, and still are, upside-down when it comes to the things of God. That is why only the mature can receive this wisdom. How could a Jewish Carpenter from Nazareth be the most important person in the universe? God's wisdom was right in front of them, and they could not see it. God's way just seemed so impractical. It seems like foolishness to them. But isn't that the way it always is? God works in his own ways. God tells Joshua to march around the city to make the walls fall down. Jesus tells Peter to catch a fish to pay their taxes. God tells Gideon that his army is too big to fight in the war. Jesus loses on the cross to win the real war against sin and Satan and death. God chooses the weak, not the strong. Jesus says that serving is the way to be great. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor; Blessed are those who mourn; Blessed are those who are meek; The first shall be the last; It is more blessed to give than receive". He even says that those who try to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for his sake will gain it. Anyone of these stories or statements would be enough to point out how God's ways are not man's ways. God's wisdom is not man's wisdom. So how do we come to believe in these things? How can we become "mature" Christians? For starters, we need to recognize that we all live by wisdom. We all make decisions by wisdom. We will either walk by what we can see or what God says is true. And this is what Paul is saying here to these Corinthians: The true fountain of wisdom from which they drank was not an eloquent preacher. It was God, by the power of His Holy Spirit

### **3. God's Wisdom is revealed by God's spirit to those who have God's spirit**

***These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except for the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 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. 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. 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. (1 Corinthians 2:10-16)***

How is it then that we receive this wisdom? Answer: We have God's Spirit and ***"these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."*** Paul gives a simple Syllogism to explain his point:

- a) No one knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him and this thought also applies to God.
- b) We have received God's Spirit when we believed in Christ.
- c) Conclusion: It is possible for us to know God's thoughts because we have God's Spirit living within us.

Do not be confused; Paul does preach. Paul imparts the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit. He is not saying that we should fall asleep on the Bible and just hope we learn. Paul says that his part is to "interpret spiritual truths". That means he explains the truth given by the Holy Spirit in the Bible. He does this "to those who are spiritual". Here "spiritual" just means to people who have the Holy Spirit.

There is a beautiful intersection that comes about when the Word of God is preached and the Spirit of God teaches. When this happens, the wisdom of God is brought to bear on a person's heart and life. It is so easy to be people of extremes. Some of you in this room tend to be Spirit people. You talk about the Spirit, enjoy the Spirit, and desire to experience the Spirit. Others in the room tend to be Word people. You really like every detail, thought and academic aspect of the Bible. You are Word people. But what Paul is saying is, if we are to grow in the wisdom of God, we need to be people of the convergence of the Word and the Spirit. We cannot be in either extreme. Just think how this is illustrated with the human body. Human eyes work in perfect harmony. Sure, you can still see with only one eye, but two gives us a broader and more perfect vision. Legs must work together in perfect harmony, or we cannot run. In the same way, you can live as a Christian life in one extreme or the other. But truth be known, you are not experiencing the fullness of God unless you experience the power of the Word and the Spirit. Leaving either out is living with one leg or one eye. Pray for the Spirit's help as you read and study the word of God. Seek that intersection of the Word and the Spirit.

But without God's Spirit, a person cannot truly understand God's Word. This is what Paul means when he speaks of "the natural person" in verse 14. The word "natural" here is a spiritually negative Greek word. This word is used in 2 other places in the NT. James 3:15: ***"This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic."*** Jude 1:19: ***"It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."*** This worldly, unspiritual, natural person has two problems. First, the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit because as we said before, their earthly upside-down view of things keeps them from being able to properly appreciate

what God is actually saying. Second, the natural man cannot understand the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. The key word here is “discerned”. This word means to appraise, discern, or to judge. This is very important because, again, many unbelievers can understand what the Word of God says. But what they cannot do is truly understand its sense and appreciate its value. They misjudge it. But the person of the Spirit judges according to what he has learned from God. In the end, no one can judge him because only God will be his judge. Paul finishes the chapter with two thoughts. First, a quote from Isaiah 40:13 on the mystery of God’s wisdom: Can anyone really give God advice? The answer is, of course, a resounding no. Second, on the other side of the coin, we have an amazing fact. We can begin to understand the great mysteries of God’s wisdom because we have the mind of Christ through the Spirit.

In the end, the lost may understand the meaning of God’s words, but they do not understand the sense behind them and nor can they give them the value they deserve even when the sense is explained to them. They are enslaved to sin, and this has tremendous effects on their judgments and values. If you put grains in front of a lion, it is capable of realizing that those are grains. In fact, they know they are edible because they have seen birds eat them. But they will neither want the grains nor choose to eat them of their own accord. That is the state of the “natural man”. He is so enslaved and blind that he will never want nor choose God’s Word. If this teaches us anything, let it help us all understand how desperately we need the work of the Spirit in our lives. To illustrate this, let me tell you a true story that happened here at IBC:

We recently received an email from a lady who had attended IBC for some days. She is a Thai woman who is studying her Ph.D. in the UK. She came to Spain for a visit. While here, she had her purse stolen and lost all her travel documents. Forced to be here, and in spiritual turmoil, she asked her friend how to deal with the stress of everything. Her friend recommended she visit a church. In her email, she writes:

“For some reasons, on 7 April, I felt like I needed to attend a service. IBC was closest to where I stayed at the time so I went there without really thinking or expecting anything much. On that day, Pastor Wyley talked about suffering, which I was deeply experiencing at that time. It might be just a coincidence but that service started to change my perspective. I felt comfort and at the same time confused. And deep down, I felt like I started to see something that I had been missing in my life. After that, I started to listen to some past sermons from both IBC and YouTube. I also talked to my Christian friend, who shared his perspectives about God and His words. From verses, I felt that I gradually understand the significance of suffering, hope and trust. I also felt God’s power and how I am unable to control anything. I used to be a person (*who*) wanted everything to be under my control and (*was*) quite manipulative. I was quite confident that everything was based on what I do. If I want something, I do this and I get what I want etc. But these circumstances did change my way of thinking. Then I learned to trust in God’s will and process. He knows what is best for us. It is not easy, but once I tried it, things feel much less heavy and much more beautiful. Another thing that was quite challenging to me is Jesus Christ. I experienced God’s power but I could not quite figure out why we needed to experience Him through Jesus. I discussed with my Christian friend but still I knew that deep down I still did not believe it until Good Friday. I remember the preaching was about the crucifixion. The pastor invited to pray for Him to be inside us that night and I prayed really hard. I asked, “please God help me connect with Jesus”. Suddenly, in my head I saw what happened to me in Spain: my

wallet was stolen, all the visa process went wrong etc. and I felt like what did I do? Why did people treat me this way? Then all past sins I deeply felt guilty about came up in my head. After that, I felt all the pain, suffering, and humiliation Jesus took to save us even though he never committed any sins. That was the moment I felt connected to Jesus for the first time. I felt so grateful for his salvation and forgiveness. I was also the moment when I decided to follow Jesus Christ for the rest of my life. And from that point, I started to see all the situations in the new light. Although it has been tough, I was not physically injured. I got support from friends and families and church all along. I now feel really thankful for what God has given me so far despite all the bad things I have committed.

After the Easter weekend, I finally received my visa and I returned to the UK yesterday. I have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ and live a God-centred life from now on. I am aware that I am still new and my approach might not be right. It might be challenging but I am sure that God will help me. I do apologize for such a long email but I do want to thank IBC, the Pastors and all the people I met there. Although I introduced myself to only few people, I felt that four services at IBC played such an important part in my first spiritual journey. Finally, I thank God for drawing me closer to Him through all the situations and encounters in Madrid. This is such a memorable and meaningful trip for me. It does change my life forever.”

Is there a God like our God? He changes lives. He saves and makes alive. Maybe that is you today. Maybe you feel the Spirit calling to your heart and don't understand everything but you want to give your life to Christ. Or maybe, you are finding yourself troubled and comforted as well, as our Thai friend did. Keep listening as she did. Keep seeking. Christ's words are Spirit and they are life, and God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him and will not turn away anyone who sincerely does so. I urge you to seek for Christ now like you would to find a hidden treasure. Eagerly receive the Gospel and call upon God in the name of Jesus Christ while there is still time. God cannot lie. He is faithful and will keep his promise to you. God will give you life in his Son and resurrect you, and all of us, on that final day. And what a happy day that will be, in glory with Him forever.

### **Thoughts to meditate upon:**

- 1.** How has the Bible impacted your life?
- 2.** In your own view, do you tend more to be a Bible person or a Spirit person? How might you grow in the areas you are weak in?
- 3.** In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says that *“Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Do you believe that about God's Word? How might you grow in?
- 4.** How does the Psalmist pray in 119:33-37? What can we learn from them? How does the Psalmist rely on God?
- 5.** How does Paul pray in Ephesians 1:15-19? How does his prayer bring the Bible and the Spirit together?