

## ***The Spirit and the Word***

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Dallas Willard makes a statement in *Renovation of the Heart* (p. 33) that has haunted me for several years. He's talking about the "mind" of a person whose soul is "ruined" (damaged by sin and rebellion):

In the ruined soul, the mind becomes a fearful wilderness and a wild intermixture of thought and feeling, manifested in willful stupidities, blatant inconsistencies, and confusions, often to the point of obsession, madness, or possession. This condition of mind is what characterizes our world apart from God.

Most of us can readily recognize ways that our minds are like a "fearful wilderness." Even though we like others to think that we're incredibly intelligent and absolutely consistent in how we live our lives, the truth is that our lives are often characterized by "willful stupidities" and "blatant inconsistencies" and "confusion." And it all flows from the condition of our minds/hearts. Proverbs was right: *As a person thinks within himself, so he is.*

Sometimes you may even wonder, "Is there any hope for me? Is it even **possible** for my mind to become ordered and consistent?" The answer to that question we've been giving during this sermon series on "The Word" is, "Absolutely. By the grace of God it is possible to have your mind renewed." We begin with a compelling vision for what the Word can mean in our lives; we cultivate a settled intention to receive whatever God shows us in Scripture; and we employ effective means/practices so that the Word of God has a settled place in our hearts.

Today we are wrapping up this sermon series by considering 1 Corinthians 2, a passage of Scripture that makes a series of mind-boggling claims about how the Holy Spirit is willing and able to transform our minds to the point where we can say with the Apostle Paul, "We have the mind of Christ." The Holy Spirit can move us from being ignorant and clueless concerning the ways of God - to the point where we actually think like Jesus does when it comes to important areas of our lives. We can have the mind of Christ concerning relationships, marriage, sexuality, friendships, finances, suffering, work, the poor, anger, etc. This passage re-casts the vision for what Scripture can mean in our lives. I pray that this message gives you hope.

***Context of 1 Corinthians 2:*** In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul explains how the Spirit (who knows the thoughts of God) revealed spiritual truth to the apostles; the apostles, in turn, taught these truths to others. One of the ways that they taught was through their writings which we now understand to be Scripture. And so what Paul talks about in this chapter ultimately applies to the Scriptures. We'll see that as we move through this passage.

Paul begins by reminding them that when he came to Corinth he didn't try to "wow" them with "superiority of speech or [human] wisdom"; he didn't rely on his powers of persuasion. To the contrary, he came to them in fear and weakness. But in the midst of

his weakness he demonstrated the power of the Spirit so that their faith would “not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” In verses 6 through 9 Paul discusses how ***The wisdom of God is received by some and rejected by others (vv. 6-9)*** Paul says this in verse 6:

6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;

The “mature” is probably a reference to all believers. In chapter 3 Paul will label the Corinthians as “immature” because they are full of jealousy and strife. But in a more foundational sense, all believers can be called mature because they’ve come to accept the truth about Christ. To the mature, Paul says that he ***does*** “speak wisdom.” But that wisdom was “however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away.” In other words, it wasn’t the type of time-bound wisdom that you would find in the world. It was timeless truth that came from God:

7 but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

The wisdom of God that Paul taught was “a mystery” and “hidden” in the sense that it was obscure in the old covenant. For example, we can go back and see that Isaiah 53 describes how the Messiah would be a “Suffering Servant” who bore our sins and griefs. It’s obvious to us now, but before Jesus came, such ideas were very fuzzy and vague. They were “hidden” and a mystery. Paul stresses that he didn’t invent this teaching about the death and resurrection of Christ; no, God predestined such wisdom before the ages. In eternity past God conceived and destined that Jesus would die for the sins of the people.

Paul notes that the powerful and influential people of his day didn’t understand this. If they had, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory; rather, people like Pilate and Herod would have fallen down and worshiped Him. In verse 9 Paul makes references to several OT passages which confirm that his message wasn’t a distillation of common thought; rather, it was the proclamation of things that were completely inaccessible to humanity:

9 but just as it is written,  
“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
And *which* have not entered the heart of man,  
All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”

Paul (and the other apostles) spoke about things that were completely opaque to human eyes and ears and hearts. Specifically, Paul had in mind “all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” This reinforces the idea that God has had a plan from eternity past that He is now working out in time. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection God is delivering to humanity all the glorious things that He prepared for

us. . . things like “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ,” and full sonship, and removing out sins as far as east is from west, and the promised Holy Spirit . . . those sorts of things.

I think it’s important for us to understand and accept that the “wisdom of God” will be received by some but rejected by others. In chapter 1 Paul noted that when they preached “Christ crucified” that people had extreme reactions. Some received the message and experienced the power of God (1:18).

But that same message was “a stumbling block” to the Jews and “foolishness” to the Greeks (1:23). The term translated “stumbling block” is *skandalon* (from which we get the word scandalous). Since the Law taught that anyone who hung on a tree (e.g., someone crucified) was cursed, it was scandalous that the Messiah would be crucified. They stumbled over the idea that the Messiah would be cursed for their sin.

To the Greeks, the idea that someone who had been found guilty by their courts and had been executed as a criminal had anything to do with their spiritual well-being was simply foolishness. This is a fairly common response to the message in our day. Sometimes people will object to the idea that Jesus’ crucifixion uniquely addressed sin (“You mean to tell me that out of all the religions in the world that you think yours is the only one who got it right?”) Sometimes people will object to the assertion that sin must be paid for (“I know I’ve done some bad things, but I wouldn’t say that my sin is so bad that somebody had to DIE for me!”). People think that the message of Christ crucified is foolish for a lot of different reasons.

This discussion begs the question, “How does anyone ever come to faith in Jesus?” Some people accept the message about Christ crucified the first time they hear it; but what about those who think it’s scandalous or foolishness? Is there any hope for them? I realize that in asking this question I may be describing some of you here today. Honestly you may think that the message of Christ crucified is “make believe” - something to which people cling because they need to believe in something.

I would simply point out that many, many people have gone from rejecting Christ crucified to believing it with all their hearts. Paul was one such person; he went from being a person who hated Christians and put them to death to being a person who loved Jesus with all his heart. A few weeks ago we had a baptism service in which several people told how at one time they really didn’t believe anything (or they believed Christians were just gullible and stupid). But they listened to the message about Christ and thought about it and discussed it with others. Through that process they came to a place of believing. It wasn’t forced upon them; rather, they came to see the beauty and truth of Christ crucified for their sins.

The fact that you’re here suggests that you’re open to the possibility that Jesus’ death and resurrection has some relevance for your life. I’d encourage you to continue exploring the Christian faith and even invite God to show you whether or not it’s true. We run an introductory course on the Christian faith called Alpha so that people just like you can hear firsthand what the Scriptures teach about Christ and have discussions in a

safe environment. You're welcome to check it out this Tuesday night (Alpha dinner party).

In the rest of this chapter Paul goes on to explain why these truths about Jesus are so powerful in the lives of those who receive them. We'll see an amazing progression here. He says that:

***The Spirit of God reveals the thoughts of God. (vv. 10-13)***

Paul is referring to himself and the other apostles when he writes:

10 For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul and the apostles the wisdom that they taught. In other words, they didn't figure out on their own that Jesus was God in the flesh who died for their sins; they didn't figure out that the Gentiles were included in salvation; they didn't figure out the significance of Christ crucified. This wisdom was revealed to them by the Spirit of God.

Paul had confidence in this revelation because the Spirit has a comprehensive knowledge of God: the Spirit searches *all things*, even the depths of God. Paul reinforces statement in verse 11 by making an analogy between the Spirit of God and the spirit of a man.

11 For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

I don't really know your thoughts unless you tell them to me. You - in your spirit - know what you really think, but I don't. I might think that you're paying attention to this sermon, but in reality you might be thinking about last night's game or about what you're doing for lunch today. Unless you tell me for sure I simply don't know your thoughts. In the same way, we simply wouldn't know the thoughts of God unless His Spirit had told us. We could project all sorts of things onto God, but we would only be guessing about what He thinks and wants.

And so in verses 12 and 13 Paul emphasizes that they (the apostles) DO know the thoughts of God because they have received the Spirit of God who searches the depths of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.

The Spirit who is from God communicated to them "the things freely given to us by God" (verse 12). As you know, God doesn't sell anything; He only gives things away

freely. The Spirit taught the apostles these things, and the apostles, in turn (verse 13), taught those very things to the Corinthians and the Galatians and the Ephesians and the Philippians. They weren't teaching their own thoughts. They were teaching the things that the Spirit had taught them.

As Paul stressed earlier in the chapter, they weren't teaching "in words taught by human wisdom"; they weren't merely offering the best that humanity had to offer. They spoke "in those [words] taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." Literally Paul says, "combining spiritual with spiritual." This expression is difficult to interpret, but most agree that Paul is saying that he (and the other apostles) used spiritual words to express the spiritual thoughts that had been revealed by the Spirit. In other words, their teachings faithfully communicated the thoughts of God.

This is what we have in the Scriptures: the depths of God revealed by the Spirit of God. We saw this in 2 Timothy 3:16 when we read that "all Scripture is inspired by God . . ." And so when you read your Bible you should pray, "Thank You, God, for not leaving me in the dark. Thank You for wanting me to know Your thoughts and Your character and Your will." Through the Scriptures we are able to walk out into the vast world of God's Kingdom.

Paul furthers the discussion in verses 14-16 by writing that. . .

***Through the Spirit we have "the mind of Christ." (2:14-16)***

In these verses Paul circles back to the reality that only some receive spiritual truth. He gives a very simple reason in verse 14:

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

The "natural man" is the person who remains in his/her natural state (that is, w/o the Spirit of God). That person does not accept the things revealed by the Spirit because they seem foolish. Furthermore, Paul says that such persons "cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised/evaluated." Without the Holy Spirit, a person cannot understand and evaluate spiritual things. D.A. Carson says it this way:

The person without the Spirit cannot properly assess what goes on in the spiritual realm – any more than a person who is color-blind is qualified to make nice distinctions in the dramatic hues of a sunset or a rainbow, any more than a person born deaf is qualified to comment on the harmony of Beethoven's Fifth or the voice and techniques of Pavarotti (p. 59).

Spiritual discernment requires the Spirit. That's why Paul also said, that "he who is spiritual appraises all things." The person who has the Spirit has the capacity to evaluate and understand all spiritual truth. Paul uses the term "all things" in a qualified sense here; he's not saying that people with the Spirit can inherently pass judgment on

every realm of knowledge (such as math or accounting or medicine). But when it comes to the spiritual realm, those who have the Spirit are uniquely qualified to understand and evaluate. Of course we don't do this in isolation from others; we do this in community.

Notice and be amazed at Paul's last line in this chapter. . . After spending so much time explaining how clueless and ignorant we are concerning God's thoughts in our natural condition, Paul write this:

16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

The first sentence is a reference to Isaiah 40:13. Isaiah 40 describes in poetic beauty how YHWH designed and created the universe and how He sovereignly guides the affairs of this world. And so the question, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?" demands that answer, "Nobody! Nobody has known the mind of the Lord. Nobody can lecture or instruct or educate Him."

But in light of everything Paul has said about the Holy Spirit, he quickly says, "But we have the mind of Christ." Even though nobody "has known the mind of the Lord," through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, "we have the mind of Christ." I don't think Paul is saying this about every single believer; I think he's referring to the believer who allows the "word of Christ" to "richly dwell" within him/her. I say that because the very next chapter Paul tells the Corinthians that they were very much un-like Christ in their thinking. They were full of fleshly (c/c spiritual) thinking; they were full of jealousy and strife - evidence that they were "walking like mere men" (3:3).

But no believer has to stay in that condition. The Spirit of God (who understands the depths of God) has revealed the thoughts of God (now recorded in Scripture). The Spirit who dwells within the believer can write the thoughts of God on our hearts/minds. The net result is that our minds function that way Jesus' mind functions. We evaluate/process/think about ourselves, other people, and our circumstances the way Christ does.

The mind of Christ isn't downloaded the moment you believe. Rather, over time, as we let the word of Christ richly dwell within us, we come to the place where we can say experientially with Paul, "We have the mind of Christ." Nobody can say this perfectly in this life, but this can progressively be true of us.

In many ways, this passage articulates my experience with Scripture over the years. Before I came to Christ I made all sorts of pronouncements about all sorts of things I knew nothing about. I can remember in high school telling people, "I'm not sure I believe in heaven and hell. . ." That's not an unusual thing for people to say, but for me that statement wasn't based on anything; it was just a hunch.

I had a superstitious attitude toward the Bible. I had a Sunday school teacher when I was a kid who told us that if you had a stack of books and one of them was a Bible, the

Bible better be on the top. And so I had a superstitious attitude toward the Bible. And I even read a couple verses before I went to bed at night. In college it didn't matter what I'd been doing that night; I'd come home and read a couple verses before falling asleep. I can't say whether or not it did me any good; it was just a habit based on the vague idea that the Bible was good for me.

But when I came to Christ as a sophomore in college, the most obvious difference I noticed was my experience with Scripture. I now understand - as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2 - that until the Spirit of God dwelt within me I couldn't understand spiritual truth. But after trusting Christ I found the Scriptures to be fascinating and nourishing. My last 3 years of college I would spend hours each week reading and studying the Bible. And progressively God began to change my mind and heart. Over the years, I've found that in some areas of my life I can honestly say that I have the mind of Christ; not perfectly, but I think I really do approach certain situations like Jesus would. In other areas I feel like I'm very immature in my thinking. But I find that the Holy Spirit is relentless; He continues to pursue me through the Word.

If I could urge anything upon you (in light of this passage) it would be: ***humble anticipation*** toward the Word. I say humble because there is nothing within us that naturally seeks after or understands God. When we were clueless and ignorant about God, He graciously revealed His mind through the Scriptures and by sending Jesus into this world. And so we approach the Scriptures mindful that if we are going to have the mind of Christ, it will be the work of the Holy Spirit. Our effort is involved, but God the Holy Spirit gives us the mind of Christ. We come to the Scriptures humbly.

But we also come with anticipation, expectant that the Spirit will nourish us and refine us through the Word. It is the will of God that we cultivate the mind of Christ. He doesn't give us the Holy Spirit for nothing. He doesn't give us the Scriptures for nothing. The Spirit wants to impress the Scriptures upon us so that we have the mind of Christ. And so I urge you to approach the Scriptures with ***humble anticipation***.