

The Necessity of Scripture

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Eugene Peterson tells a story that gets us into today's topic. He has us imagine a group of men, women, boys, and girls who live in a huge warehouse. They were all born in this warehouse, and unless something changes they will all live out their days, and die in this warehouse. It contains everything they need to live physically. There are no exits in or out of the warehouse, but there are windows which are coated with an inch of dust that has accumulated over the years.

One day some of the children get curious, drag a stool over to a window, wipe the grime off of it and look out! They discover a world that they never knew existed. They see a group of people pointing upward and talking in animated voices. The children look up, but all they see is the ceiling of the warehouse. Eventually they conclude that "those people out there are crazy." There's no reason to look up and get excited. In reality, those people were looking at airplanes and flocks of geese and magnificent cloud formations. But the children thought they were crazy.

What would happen, though, if one day one of those kids cut a door out of the warehouse, coaxed his friends out, and discovered the immense sky above them and the grand horizons beyond them? That is what happens . . . when we open the Bible - we enter the totally unfamiliar world of God, a world of creation and salvation stretching endlessly above and beyond us. Life in the warehouse never prepared us for anything like this. (*Eat This Book*, pp. 6-7)

The warehouse represents everything we can understand through observation and logic and human wisdom. As you know, many people are convinced that the material world is all there is and that people who "look up" and point to God are deluded.

In today's passage Paul is trying to coax us "out of the warehouse." He tells us that instead of living in the small, confined world of human wisdom, the wisdom from God draws us into a vast world of spiritual realities that is explained in Scripture. [General revelation vs. special revelation - what you can observe through creation vs. what you can learn through Scripture]

Last week we began a four-week series we've entitled ***Formed by the Word***. We are studying four attributes of Scripture that Protestants have held down through the centuries. Last week we considered "the authority of Scripture" which means that God's Word is the final word on everything it addresses. Specifically, Scripture is our authority for salvation (entering into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus) and sanctification (growing in holiness).

Today we will be discussing "the necessity of Scripture." The "necessity of Scripture" reminds us that we need God's Word because it reveals essential truths that we would not otherwise know. Therefore, if we want to know who God is and how to relate to him, we should approach Scripture as the treasure it is.

Let me briefly set the context of 1 Corinthians 2. The church at Corinth was a divided, immature, proud church. They boasted in their favorite teachers, in their spiritual gifting, and other things. But Paul argues that the message of the cross precludes **anybody** from boasting in **anything** other than “Christ crucified.” Their boasting was evidence that they were relying on worldly wisdom.

But the Corinthians should know better. When they came to Christ very few of them were impressive by the world’s standards (wisdom, power, noble birth). They were ordinary, simple men and women, boys and girls. When Paul came to Corinth and preached the gospel, he didn’t try to impress them with rhetorical skills or with worldly wisdom. Rather, he simply preached Christ crucified. He didn’t want their faith to rest on human wisdom, but on the power of God.

This context is crucial for understanding 1 Corinthians 2:6–16. These verses highlight that we don’t have to live by worldly wisdom (we don’t have to live in the warehouse); in Scripture we have the “secret, hidden wisdom of God.” Therefore, we should treat it as the treasure it is.

Paul tells us two foundational things related to the necessity of Scripture.

In Scripture the Spirit of God has revealed the secret, hidden wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 2:6-13)

Even though Paul didn’t try to impress them with “human wisdom,” he most definitely did impart a wisdom. But it is not like the wisdom of this age.

6 Yet among the mature [a reference to believers] 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.

Rather, we read in verse 7:

7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

A couple things about the wisdom Paul imparted. First, the message of Christ crucified was a mystery that had been hidden but now had been revealed. You may remember that in Luke 24 after being raised from the dead, Jesus “opened the minds” of his disciples to understand the Scriptures - that the Christ **had** to die and he **had** to be raised on the third day.

Second, this wisdom from God was “decreed before the ages for our glory.” This wisdom predated the current wisdom of the world (which changes from culture to culture and generation to generation). And this wisdom will endure long after the wisdom of the world and its rulers pass away.

In verse 8 Paul makes a fascinating point about the hiddenness of the gospel:

8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Pilate, Herod, and the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem didn't have any clue that crucifying Jesus would accomplish his mission of paying for the sin of humanity. And they had no clue that his crucifixion was a prelude to his resurrection. If they had understood this, "they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory."

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"—

In other words, what God has prepared for those who love him was beyond human perception. God's generosity toward his people is inscrutable, beyond the capacity of eyes and ears and even the human heart. What we could never imagine, God revealed:

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

The "us" here in verse 10 refers to Paul and the other apostles. As Jesus' spokesmen, the apostles received revelation from the Holy Spirit that they taught the churches and wrote to the churches. In light of his comment that "the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God," Paul asks a rhetorical question in verse 11.

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.

As I stand here looking at you, most of you seem like you're paying attention. But I have no idea what you're really thinking. I hope you are thinking deeply about the necessity of Scripture; but you could be thinking about what you're having for lunch. Only your spirit (the immaterial, internal part of you) knows your thoughts.

"So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." We could guess the thoughts of God, but only his Spirit truly comprehends his thoughts. This is why Scripture is necessary: we can't read God's mind. We needed his Spirit to reveal his thoughts to the Apostles (and a few others close to them) who eventually wrote the documents we call the New Testament. Paul continues:

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.

Again, I think Paul is primarily speaking about the Apostles receiving the Spirit who is from God so that they "might understand the things freely given us by God." In John 16:12-13 Jesus had told his original disciples this:

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on

his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

The Spirit of God gave them understanding of the things that were beyond human perception. We read in verse 13 that the things they understood, they imparted to the churches.

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.

When Paul imparted (through teaching and writing) what the Spirit had revealed to him, he used “words. . . taught by the Spirit” (not human wisdom). The second half of the verse is notoriously difficult to understand; there are a number of different understandings. But I tend to think that the NIV’s translation is best when it says, “explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.” They used the exact right words words that were appropriate for expressing spiritual truths (in contrast with the “lofty speech” he said he avoided back in verse 1).

In Scripture the Spirit of God has revealed the secret, hidden wisdom of God.

Therefore we should treat Scripture as the treasure it is. If you were with us last week, you know that we’re encouraging you to spend significant time in Psalm 119, letting it form how you approach God through the Scriptures. You may have noticed that the psalmist treated God’s word as the treasure it is. He repeatedly refers to God’s word/ commands/precepts being like a treasure or more valuable than riches. For example, in Psalm 119:72 we read:

72 The law of your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

The psalmist had come to the conviction that the law/teachings that came from the mouth of God (i.e., God-breathed) was of infinite value. That’s why he treasured it in his heart (v. 11); that’s why he cried out to God to teach him and not let him wander from his commands (v. 68). He implicitly knew that ignoring the the word of God would mean squandering a precious, life-giving, life-saving gift God.

Is that how you think about the Scriptures? Is that how you want to think about the Scriptures? If so, pray Psalm 119 - any of it or all of it. “God, the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver peices. . .” If you can’t pray honestly pray that, pray, “God, bring to the place where the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.” That’s where we need to get if we are going to be formed by the Word.

The next thing Paul says in today’s passage speaks to the Spirit’s commitment to forming us with the Scriptures.

The indwelling Spirit of God illuminates the Scriptures so that we might have “the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:14-16) Paul first explains that not everybody wants to know the things revealed by the Spirit.

14 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.

Paul tells us two things about the natural person (the person who isn't indwelt by the Spirit of God). First, the natural person ***doesn't*** accept the things of the Spirit of God. Why? Because as he established in chapter 1, the message of the cross is folly/ foolishness to them. If you think some claim is foolish you're not going to accept it. In our natural condition, we are predisposed to think that the message of the cross is foolish; in our pride we don't want to believe that we are so sinful that the sinless Son of God had to die for us.

Paul not only says that the natural person ***doesn't*** accept the things of the Spirit; he says that the natural person ***cannot*** accept them because they are “spiritually discerned.” Without the Spirit of God, the natural person cannot understand them. This was Paul's own experience before Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). He did not and could not believe that a crucified man could be the Savior of the world.

All of this points to necessity of the Spirit of God opening a person's heart and eyes and ears to accept the gospel. If you have to come to understand and believe the gospel, it's because that Spirit of God has done that work in your heart. If you don't understand and believe the gospel yet, cry out to God to do this work in your heart and to give you understanding. He loves answering that prayer.

Verse 15 Paul makes a statement that has been misapplied in some rather arrogant ways.

15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

The “spiritual person” is the person with the Spirit of God, the Christian. Paul isn't saying that Christians are always right about everything or that Christians should never be challenged or corrected. But rather, in the context of this passage, Paul is saying that the person who was formerly dead in sin but is now alive in Christ can understand both worlds (see DA Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, pp. 58-59). That person understands the full range of spiritual conditions. But the natural person (who has not experienced the new birth) doesn't understand both worlds and therefore cannot assess what is happening in the spiritual world.

In verse 16 Paul first makes reference to Isaiah 40, a passage that asks a series of rhetorical questions that make clear that God never needs to consult with us concerning how the universe should be run. Rather, God is already perfect in all his ways. Paul alludes to Isaiah 40:16 when he asks:

16 “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

The implied answer to the question is, of course, “Nobody. Nobody has understood the mind of the Lord and nobody gives him advice.” When Paul adds, “But we have the mind of Christ,” Paul is doing something incredibly significant. He is saying that even though we (believers) are in no position to give God advice, ***because we have the Spirit and because we therefore accept the hidden, secret wisdom of God***, “we have the mind of Christ.” To the degree that we accept and internalize the Scriptures, we now think the way Christ thinks (which is also how God the Father thinks).

Don’t miss how staggering this statement really is. When you read the gospels, you see that nobody except Christ had the mind of Christ. Even his closest disciples lacked the mind of Christ. They challenged what he said, they tried to tell him how his thinking was off, and the often disbelieved his clear teachings. But Jesus had promised them that when he returned to the Father he would send the Holy Spirit who bring to their remembrance what he had taught and who would lead them into all truth. And he “opened their minds to understand” the Scriptures that were so opaque to them. That’s why we have the secret, hidden wisdom of God accurately and faithfully preserved in Scripture.

And the same Holy Spirit who empowered the authors to write the Scriptures now lives within the believer and illuminates (shine the light upon) the Scriptures. This doesn’t happen by accident and it doesn’t happen over night. But when we intentionally let the words of Scripture abide/remain within us, over time we increasingly have the mind of Christ. Again, ***this points to the absolute necessity of Scripture***. We could never have the mind of Christ without the 66 books of the Bible and without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This past week a friend called to encourage me (he sensed that I needed some courage in a couple areas of my life). After we talked for a few minutes, he very directly and compassionately reminded me of some things that are true of me; he didn’t make stuff up, he reminded me of some things that Scripture says about every believer. And he reminded me of some things that are true about God (things revealed in Scripture). And then we talked about the passage we’re studying this morning. I mentioned that it ended with, “But we have the mind of Christ.” He asked, “What do you think that means?” I said, “What you just said to me was the mind of Christ.” Because he has saturated his mind with God-breathed Scripture for many years, he thinks like Jesus and speaks like Jesus. And that was a great gift to me. And that’s the gift we can give others

None of us do this perfectly, but to the degree that we accept and internalize the Scriptures, we have the mind of Christ. To go back to opening illustration, we don’t have to live in a warehouse. We don’t have to live according to the fickle, petty, stale wisdom of the world. God’s Word coaxes us out into the vast, expansive, stable world of the kingdom of God.