

The Imperfect Church – 5
The Spiritual Church
1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Introduction

We are going to dive right into the text today and there is much to cover. This is a pivotal text in 1 Corinthians that gets right at the heart of the issues they were facing. He has just told them in the text we looked at last week, 2:1-5, that when he originally came to them he deliberately ignored human wisdom and intellect. Instead he brought to them the simple Gospel in a simple style so that they for sure knew that their trust was not in human wisdom, but in God's power to save. Now he will continue hammering that truth home and strike at the core of our faith.

1 Corinthians 2:2-16 – ² For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. ⁴ And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. ⁵ I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

⁶ Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. ⁷ No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. ⁸ But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. ⁹ That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."

¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

¹³ When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. ¹⁴ But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can

understand what the Spirit means. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. ¹⁶ For, “Who can know the Lord’s thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?” But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

TS – in this text, Paul shows us two critical truths about the Gospel:

1. THE GOSPEL CONCEALED (2:6-9)

Paul starts off by correcting any misunderstanding we may have. He is not opposed to wisdom. Humanity is incredibly smart and has achieved unbelievable things in the world. Just think of the technological and medical advances of even the last few decades. The generations before us could not have conceived of such a world. We benefit every day from the wisdom and intelligence of the world around us. We aren’t opposed to any of that, we love that and benefit from that. It is when worldly wisdom attempts to answer questions of eternal significance that the problem arises. Human wisdom is utterly powerless to address issues of origins, meaning, or eternal destinations.

v. 6 - ⁶ Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten.

There is a wisdom in this world, brought to us by the powerbrokers of this world. The Hollywood elite, leaders in politics, education, and business, are all purveyors of this wisdom. And as great and helpful as that worldly wisdom can be, the kind of wisdom Paul is concerned with is a kind that does not belong to this world. Neither the philosophies nor the philosophers of this world are his issue. He traffics in a specific kind of wisdom.

v. 7 - ⁷ No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.

He comes back to this mystery idea that he brought up in v. 1. One of Paul’s favorite ways to refer to the truths of the Gospel is by calling it a mystery, God’s secret plan to save the world through Jesus. Remember he has already introduced us to this paradox of wisdom and foolishness in chapter 1. He told us that what appears to be wise in the world’s eyes is actually foolish, and what appears to be God’s foolishness shown in the cross of Jesus, is actually true wisdom. Human wisdom isn’t wise after all.

1 Corinthians 1:20-23 - ²⁰ So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. ²¹ Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. ²² It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. ²³ So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

This supposed foolishness of the Gospel, Christ crucified, is actual wisdom. And that is the only wisdom that Paul is concerned about. And this wisdom, the Gospel, is a mystery, hidden by God, unattainable by human wisdom. No one will ever know God by means of human wisdom and intelligence. It is beyond them.

v. 8-9 - ⁸ But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. ⁹ That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,
 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
 and no mind has imagined
 what God has prepared
 for those who love him."

That OT quote is from Isaiah 64:4, and is usually misapplied to be talking about Heaven, because Heaven will be so great and beyond imagination. But do you see any mention of Heaven here? That's not what this text is about. It is in reference to the cross. This eternal plan of God to send Jesus to the world, that he would die as our substitute on the cross, rise from the dead three days later and promise salvation and eternal life for all who trust in him...that plan has been concealed by God. And the three great sources of human intellect (eyes, ears, mind...what we see, hear, and understand) are all powerless to understand the Gospel on their own.

What is Paul's point? The Gospel is greater than you think. Your intelligence is not that intelligent. Your wisdom is not that wise. You did not figure this out on your own.

2. THE GOSPEL REVEALED (2:10-16)

If the text stopped there in v. 9 we would be hopeless. God's plan is a mystery that we are incapable of figuring out and participating in. God is unattainable up there, and we are impotent down here. He's wise, we're foolish. He's strong, we're weak. Game over. But...he continues and shows us the beautiful truth that God has chosen to unveil the Gospel. God, out of

his mercy and love for us, has chosen to invite us into the mystery. By his Spirit, God uses three primary means to communicate to us the Gospel. These are the three great ministries of the Holy Spirit: (a) Revelation, (b) Inspiration, (c) Illumination.

- (a) **Revelation** - v. 10-12 - ¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

God has revealed these things by his Spirit. We didn't figure them out on our own, God chose to reveal. And he uses a brilliant illustration to help us understand that truth: no one knows you better than you do. As close as you may be to someone else, even a spouse married to for decades, you are still the expert on you. Only you know what is going on inside your head. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, knows God's mind. He is the only one who knows what is going on in God's heart and mind. And when we place our trust in Christ, we receive the indwelling presence of the same Holy Spirit. Now, God's Spirit can talk to our spirit and we can know what God is up to. Only by God's choice to reveal the Gospel do we know it and are saved by it.

- (b) **Inspiration** - v. 13 - ¹³ When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.

When Paul says "we tell you these things" the "we" he is referring to is referencing the other apostles, those church leaders with the authority to speak on God's behalf. Those who, when they speak and write, are being used by the Holy Spirit to produce the New Testament. They are speaking, Paul says, the very words "given to us by the Spirit." When we say that the Bible is inspired, that is what we mean. It is given to us by the Holy Spirit, through the preaching and writing of the Apostles.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 - ¹⁴ But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. ¹⁵ You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

We come to know God and the Gospel through the Bible. It is his revelation of himself and his ways. We have not come to salvation because we were so smart to figure him out. He literally wrote a book that explains it all and gave it to us.

- (c) Illumination – v.14-16 - ¹⁴ But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. ¹⁶ For, "Who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

When Paul uses the word 'spiritual' he isn't using the same idea as people do today when they say things like "I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual." Meaning they like to think they believe in God, might pray from time to time, but don't go to church anywhere. That's not what Paul means. What he means by 'spiritual' is those who possess the Holy Spirit. It's the Greek word *pneumatic* like we use today for drills and other tools that are powered by air. Someone who is operated by and filled with the Spirit is spiritual.

Notice his clear usage of insider and outsider language. There are those who have the Spirit (spiritual) and those who do not (unspiritual). The spiritual can understand the Gospel because they have the Holy Spirit, those who are unspiritual cannot because they do not. This is the doctrine of illumination. Only God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, can cause someone to grasp the truth of Scripture and come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is why two people can read the same Bible while one rejects it and one embraces it.

Again, what is Paul's point? We did not figure this out on our own. The Holy Spirit opened our eyes to it all. In fact, he uses 6 specific verbs to let us know the depth of the Holy Spirit's involvement in our coming to understand the Gospel (3 of them on the preacher side of it, 3 on the listener side).

Preacher:	Know - v. 12	Hearer:	Receive - v. 14
	Tell - v. 13		Understand - v. 14
	Explain - v. 13		Evaluate - v. 14

I love how he ends in v. 16 – "But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ." Not we understand because we have a brilliant mind. Not because we are so wise. But because we have the mind of Christ. Through revelation of truth, the inspiration of Scripture, and illumination by the Holy Spirit, we have been given the mind of Christ.

Conclusion

Why does Paul feel the need to continue to hammer home these truths? In 1964 Milton Rokeach published a book entitled [\[pic – book cover\]](#) "The Three Christs of Ypsilanti" from the city in Michigan where the studies were conducted. The book, made into an all-star cast movie in 2017, follows the clinical journey of Dr. Rokeach as he attempted to treat three patients who all suffered from the same manifestation of paranoid schizophrenia. All three patients, Leon, Joseph, and Clyde, suffered from a Messiah complex. And not just meaning that they all thought too highly of themselves, Leon, Joseph, and Clyde all believed they were reincarnations of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Rokeach eventually became so fed up with his failure to successfully treat these men that he attempted a radical experiment. He moved all three patients into the same room. They lived together, ate together, played together, did everything together. He had hoped that maybe by interacting with one another they would realize they were not actually Jesus after all. Ultimately the experiment did not work as planned, but it did lead to some very interesting conversations. Once, Leon said, "I am the Messiah, the Son of God. I am on a mission. I was sent here to save the earth." Rokeach, somewhat amused asked him, "Well, how do you know?" Leon replied, "God told me." To which Clyde responded, "I never told you any such thing!"

All of these efforts by Dr. Rokeach and his team were designed to cure the delusion that these men had. They thought they were much more important than they really were. They believed they were more intelligent than they were, wiser than they were, on the same level as God. That delusion needed to be shattered and replaced by the realistic truth.

That is exactly what Paul has been doing in 1 Corinthians 1-2. These Corinthian Christians live in a cultural context defined by elite intelligence and worldly wisdom. They live in a world-leading and world-influencing city. Due to the commercial influence of their city, wealth abounds. They are part of Greece, the academic and intellectual source of the ancient world. They are part of the Roman Empire, the power center of the planet. Outside of their culture is poverty, emptiness, and foolishness. Those living outside of the Roman Empire were referred to as the Barbarians. They could not read, could not write, and did not have the sophistication of Corinth. Corinth even turned their intelligence and wisdom into a financial enterprise. The traveling Wise Men, the Sophists, were elite academics and were the source of the leading ideas in the ancient world.

That success, that intelligence, that wisdom, brought a swagger, a prideful attitude, an arrogance to Corinth. And these Corinthian Christians had not been able to sever ties with that swagger. And they brought that arrogance into the Church. Just like all the other philosophical ideas of their day, they were the smart ones to figure God out. After all, look how amazing they are...God saved them. God wants them on his team. Just like all the other gods and goddesses of the Greeks and Romans, they figured all this out on their own. To them, the Gospel was just another new idea they figured out. Paul steps into their city and gives them these truths about the Gospel to hammer them into humility.

Paul is trying to destroy their arrogance. To shatter their delusion that they are such a big deal. Because that is truly delusional. Your salvation, from start to finish, is the work of God. He is the sole proprietor of salvation. From eternity past when God planned and preordained all that would happen, to eternity future when God will unite with his people in glory, there is only one who gets any credit for any of it. Humility is a chief characteristic of the Church because everything we have has been given to us.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – ⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Back to Leon, Joseph, Clyde, and Dr. Rokeach. The graduate students who worked with Rokeach on the project were strongly critical of the morality of the project because of the amount of dishonesty and manipulation used and the amount of distress experienced by the patients. Rokeach eventually agreed that his research had indeed been manipulative and unethical, and he offered an apology in the afterword of the 1984 edition of the book: "I really had no right, even in the name of science, to play God and interfere round the clock with their daily lives." Rokeach added a comment in the final revision of the book that, while the experiment did not cure any of the three Christs, "It did cure me of my godlike delusion that I could manipulate them out of their beliefs."

All of us, not only those being clinically treated, but also the doctors doing the treating, and all in between, ultimately have the same delusion. We all like to think we are wiser, more intelligent than we really are. We even think that we are not only on the same level as God, but sometimes that we know more than he does. The truth of the Gospel says otherwise. All that we have we have been given.