

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Wisdom Among The Mature

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1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 2:6. Having criticised the worldly thinking and worldly wisdom behind their present state of conflict and disunity, Paul begins to speak about a different type of wisdom – a wisdom from God that characterises the truly mature and spiritual person. The context indicates that when Paul is using the word “wisdom” here he seems to be thinking both of the message of the cross and what we might call “the cross centered life”. He’s talking about how we become a Christian and how we live as Christians. Keep in mind that wisdom in that culture meant both understanding and prudence. It meant seeing the world correctly and the living your life appropriately. So Paul says: “There is a wisdom from God. There is a way of eternal and abundant life. There is such a way, it is a cross centered way, but sadly I see precious little evidence of it in your church. The fact of your fighting is proof of your foolishness”. That is the argument that Paul begins to make. We pick it up at verse 6. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

⁶ 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. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, 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” —

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

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. 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.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.

¹⁴The 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.¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

¹But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? (1 Corinthians 2:6–3:4 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Paul’s argument about the wisdom that is from God seems to have 4 parts to it. First of all he says:

The Wisdom That Is From God:

1. It is hidden from the natural man

In verse 7 Paul calls this wisdom:

a secret and hidden wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:7 ESV)

Now Paul is careful to say that this wisdom from God is hidden but in a special kind of way. The word translated as “secret” is the word *mysterion* from which we get our word “mystery”. It doesn’t mean a riddle to be solved, rather it means something hidden in plain site. Paul is saying that the narrow gate of salvation and the narrow way of Christian living is not hidden in the sense that it is unavailable, it is hidden in the sense that people see it but they don’t see it all at the same time. They see it but it doesn’t look like anything special. They can hear the cross of Christ preached a dozen times and it doesn’t seem to mean anything to them at all. They can look at Christian people living the Christian life and they don’t see anything special at all. They just see a bunch of suckers worshipping the sky fairy and wasting their time and money. They are staring right at it! They are maybe living in a home where the Gospel is shared regularly and where people are really and truly walking with Christ and it makes no impression on them what so ever. Its hidden in plain sight and they can’t see it no matter how often they look. The wisdom of God cannot be found by sinful men and women. They are blind to the truth because

they are dead in their sin.

The good news comes in what Paul says next. The wisdom from God:

2. It is revealed through preaching and the work of the Holy Spirit

Paul is being intentionally ironic here. Back in chapter 1:21 he said:

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through **the folly of what we preach** to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21 ESV)

Some of your Bibles will have that as “through the folly of preaching”; both are grammatically possible and both are probably implied. Paul is saying that God is doing a funny thing here, he is introducing WISDOM – a gate of life and a way of living – THROUGH the foolishness of preaching! So the gate of life and the way of life can be found in preaching, but we already know that it won’t be found and it can’t be found by the natural man or woman, so why does Paul bother? Preaching shouldn’t work but Paul does it anyway. Three times in this passage Paul talks about “imparting” this way of wisdom. In verse 6 he says:

Yet among the mature we do **impart** wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6 ESV)

we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:7 ESV)

In 2:13 he says:

And **we impart** this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Corinthians 2:13 ESV)

Each time he uses the word *laleo* which means to speak or to preach. We put this out there, Paul says, we – here meaning Paul and the Apostles – we put this Gospel out there knowing that it is foolish to do so, knowing that the natural man will look at it and see nothing of value, knowing that people will mock us and ridicule us BECAUSE we know that the Spirit is working – he is interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual people. The Spirit of God is helping people to understand the wisdom of God. In verse 12 Paul says:

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. (1 Corinthians 2:12 ESV)

This is what we refer to as the ministry of illumination. Illumination is when the Holy Spirit within you helps you to understand and take hold of the message of the Gospel from the whole Word of God. Inspiration is what the Holy Spirit did with the Apostles so that they could write down the wisdom of God. Illumination is what the Holy Spirit does in you so that you can understand it and believe it.

Let me bring this down to street level. Paul is saying that an unsaved person could come to church and hear a thousand sermons and not be moved by any of it. It would sound like complete nonsense to him. He would hear it, but it would bounce right off the hardness of his heart and the deadness of his mind. But when the Holy Spirit changes a human heart, all of the sudden its like we have an interpreter now inside our brains explaining to us the beauty of God's wisdom and the meaning of God's word. Now all of the sudden we hear the Gospel and we get it. We might have heard it a 1000 times before, but all of the sudden, seemingly out of nowhere, we get it. It sounds beautiful and appropriate and true and we reach out and we lay hold of it with all our strength and with all our will. That's how you got saved and Paul says, that how you will continue to grow. The Word of God will wash over you and the Holy Spirit will work within you. He will be inside you explaining things and applying things; he will be grabbing hold of truths that should be flying right over your head, but he will snatch those things seemingly right out of the air and he will use them to sanctify you and to teach you the ways of life. That's how people get saved and that's how saved people grow. This is how spiritual people lay hold of the wisdom that is from God.

The third thing Paul says about the wisdom of God is that:

3. It is for our good and for our glory

Look at verse 7:

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages **for our glory**. (1 Corinthians 2:7 ESV)

For our glory! Paul will talk at length about God's glory but the wisdom of God is also for our glory. The wisdom of God is for our glory! The wisdom of God – I'm talking about the big category here, the narrow gate and the narrow way, I'm talking about all the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD here, the Christian WAY. I'm talking about "love your neighbor as yourself", I'm talking about "forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven you", I'm talking about "turn the other cheek", I'm talking about "it is more blessed to give than to receive", I'm talking about "let he who is without sin cast the first stone" – THE JESUS WAY, the WISDOM OF GOD makes MORE OF US than we have any right to claim. The Gospel restores the image of God in us and allows us to begin changing by one degree OF GLORY TO THE NEXT into the same image as Jesus Christ! The Gospel glorifies God – YES – but it also glorifies you; it glorifies me. It makes us live better now even as it allows us to live forever with God in eternity. It changes you and it makes you better. Listen to what Paul says in verse 16:

"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?"
(1 Corinthians 2:16 ESV)

Who can know God? Who can think God's thoughts after him? Paul is asking a rhetorical question. What does it sound like the answer is supposed to be? No one! In fact he is quoting from the Old Testament where the question is in fact anticipating a negative answer. He's quoting Isaiah 40:13 where the prophet asks:

¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴ Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13–14 ESV)

What is the answer to those questions? NO ONE!!!

But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16 ESV)

We're not like regular people. The answer to that question used to be NO ONE, but not anymore. Now the answer is – YOU. Who can know the mind of the Lord? Who can think God's thoughts after him? YOU CAN! By God's grace and by continual supplies of the Spirit and over time as you sit under the Word, and as God changes your heart and teaches your mind YOU CAN THINK THE THOUGHTS OF GOD! We have the mind of Christ!

That's the climax of Paul's argument about the wisdom that is from God. But then he does a very sneaky and a very pastoral thing. He says: "That's what should happen in truly saved people. God takes away the heart of stone, he gives them a heart of flesh, he puts the Holy Spirit inside of them so that they can begin to think the thoughts of God and conform to the image of Jesus in all their actions and behaviours. Its GLORIOUS but, here's the thing, I see precious little evidence of that process in your church."

That's Paul's final and most devastating point about the wisdom of God in Christ. He says:

4. Our progress in it gives evidence of our faith and maturity

Look at chapter 3:1-4:

¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And **even now you are not yet ready**, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 ESV)

The fact that you are fighting and dividing over foolish things only demonstrates your immaturity and weakness. You barely look saved at all. That's what Paul says. "When I hear you fighting and dividing over silly, meaningless things, I have to honest with you. All I can hear is: "Wah, wah, wah, I'm a baby Christian! Wah, wah, wah, I might not even be saved!" 'How can you be fighting about this?', he asks. Jesus Christ died on a cross to forgive you of your sins. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, blind to his mercy and destined for the pit of hell until God in Christ took pity upon you. Now let's be clear, he didn't wait for you to see things his way, he didn't wait for you to apologize to him, he didn't wait for you to clean up your act – HE WENT FIRST! Now, here you are dividing the body of Christ over petty differences and offenses. Enough! You should be ashamed of yourselves! All that this conflict reveals to me is that you barely understand the Gospel and that you are only marginally saved people." That's what Paul is saying, which for some of us, is probably hard to hear.

Conflict and division is taken by the Apostle Paul as evidence of weak faith, or possibly even

non-faith. It seems to suggest that you just don't get the Gospel. It seems to suggest that you haven't even begun to understand the wisdom of God. Later in chapter 6 after reviewing some other conflicts and divisions, he throws up his hands and asks an absolutely wonderful and insightful question:

Why not rather suffer wrong? (1 Corinthians 6:7 ESV)

Why not suffer wrong? Why do you care so much about these petty little offenses? Why do you need closure on this? You don't need to process every petty offense. You really don't. God forgave you before you deserved it. God reached out to you when you couldn't reach out to him, what then gives you the right to hold people to a standard of justice that if universally enforced would certainly condemn each and every one of you to hell? You should know better. After all, the church is full of people who are simultaneously saint and sinner. That implies the inevitability of offense. However the church is also built around the cross – that implies the presence of grace and unwarranted forgiveness. So, unless you need to process a wrong done to you because it threatens the Gospel or the safety of brothers and sisters in Christ, let it go. The fact that you are fighting over foolish things only reveals your immaturity.

That's Paul's argument; that is what he said to them, now, in the few minutes we have left I'd like to suggest a couple of appropriate responses. We understand of course that what Paul said to them is given by God to us for our good and for our glory so let me suggest a few things.

Responding To The Text:

First of all:

1. In the church, because of the cross, let's be careful what we fight about

Jesus paid a heavy price to build a community of grace and forgiveness. Don't diminish or obscure that by harboring petty offenses. People are supposed to come into the church and discover grace and mercy. That's very hard to do when the members of the church are harboring offenses. Listen to me carefully. Your offense, unless it is a Gospel offense is an offense against the Gospel. Let it go. Let it go. If you can't let it go then according to Jesus you have probably

never taken hold of the cross. Jesus said that. Did you know that multiple times in the Bible Jesus says that if you hold on to offense against a Christian brother or sister, it proves that you are outside the Gospel and therefore under the wrath of God?

but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
(Matthew 6:15 ESV)

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25 ESV)

Jesus told a long story in Matthew 18 about a man who was forgiven a great debt by his master. However, he showed his unworthiness by his failure to respond by extending grace and mercy to his fellow servants. He beat up a man who owed him a few dollars and had the man cast into prison. Do you recall how Jesus ended that story?

³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.’ ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”
(Matthew 18:32–35 ESV)

Failure to forgive is an offense against the cross and it angers God the Father. God paid a great price – he sacrificed something very precious to purchase your redemption and to create a community of peace. When you get all hot and bothered over petty nonsense it shows that you don’t get it, it suggests that you never got it and it summons the wrath of God. In the church, because of the cross, be careful what you fight about.

And then secondly, we need to:

2. Prioritize prayer, attendance and repentance

I realize that sounds way too simple, but it is a logical implication of the text. Paul says that people grow in the wisdom of God as the Word of God washes over them and the Spirit of God works within them. That suggests that a miracle will happen in a certain place at a certain time during a certain event. You have to be there in the right place at the right time to benefit from the miracle. Change happens to those who show up. When the Word is being opened, you come and sit under it. Pray before you come that the Spirit will work within you. Then hear what God is

saying to you and what the Spirit is interpreting within you and anywhere you see that your life does not line up with what you've heard and understood then REPENT! Point at it in prayer to God and say: "Father! Look! There is a thing in my life that is not like what I just heard you say it should be like! I repent of that! I'm turning my back on that God! Help me hate it and walk away and walk into the ways of life. For your glory, for my glory and my good." That's what repentance is. Its you agreeing with God that this thing in your life is not a Gospel thing and it needs to go. Its you asking God to help you hate what comes so natural to you and to bend your desires in totally new and foreign and life giving ways. So, pray before you sit under the word. Pray while you are sitting under the word. Pray and repent after you sit under the word and you will change, by one degree of glory to the next.

Lastly, let's:

3. Be discerning in all our judgments

Paul introduces an idea in verse 15 that many of us probably struggle to receive. He says:

The spiritual person judges all things (1 Corinthians 2:15 ESV)

Now, in the flow of Paul's argument that makes perfect sense. Let's zoom out here for a second. Paul has basically been saying that their worldly values and their worldly wisdom have been creating division and conflict in the church. So he condemns those values and that wisdom. Then he says: "But there is a wisdom from God. The fallen man doesn't see it but the saved man does. The saved man, helped by the Holy Spirit begins to think wisely" and now Paul says, "he thinks wisely about **all things**". The saved person; the spiritual person judges ALL THINGS – there is not a single square inch of life that falls outside the scrutiny of the cross. The saved person, helped by the Holy Spirit has a cross centered view of everything: a cross centered view of money, a cross centered view of sex, a cross centered view of ministry, a cross centered view of authority and a cross centered view of the church. Everything is analyzed, everything is scrutinized, everything is discerned through the lens of Christ crucified. That is what it means to take every thought captive, that is how you build a Christian worldview and that is how the spiritual person judges all things.

We need to hear that afresh in our day. Many are the voices in Christendom telling us to be silent on this or that issue in the culture. We are told to confine ourselves to discussion of the “gospel” as if the Gospel rightly understood does not lead to corrected thinking on sex, money, marriage gender and everything else in life and culture. “Just tell people how to get saved”, the wise men of the church tell us, “don’t risk offense by talking about these other things”. That is blasphemy, Paul would say. That is rebellion, Jesus would say. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You have the Holy Spirit inside you interpreting and explaining the deep and hidden things of God. You have a new heart and a renewed mind and you can see now what no one else can see! How can you stay silent when all around you men and women are lost and dying in the dark? For the glory of God and the good of all people, for Christ’s sake, open your mouth and bring the wisdom of God within reach of those who are perishing! The spiritual person judges all things by the light of the cross. You can do this, brothers and sisters, you must do this, because you are a blood bought Christian and you have the mind of Christ. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let’s pray.

Suggested response:

Before the last verse of the closing song the worship leader should invite people to respond in one of two ways. He should ask the elders/pastors to come up and to stand ready on both sides of the front. For those who wish to confess unnecessary offense they should go here and ask for pray that they may properly and truly repent. For those who wish to ask God for help to think clearly so as to speak boldly to a certain person or into a certain issue then they should come up to this side and ask for prayer toward that end. Come to the front as the Lord leads during the singing of this last verse after which time Pastor Paul will close the service in prayer.