

# The Spirit of God vs. The Spirit of This World

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

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Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 2, and we're going to zero in on verses 12-13. I love this passage. It was instrumental in my conversion. I came to Christ at age 17, when I opened my Bible at random one night, thinking I would read a short verse or two.

That was not something I ordinarily did. I was a churchgoer but in a really liberal denomination. And I was not a Bible reader. (I owned one of those Bibles that closed with a zipper cover, and I kept it zipped so that it would stay in mint condition.) But that night I was feeling melancholy and looking for something that would make me feel good about *me*. So I opened the Bible and kind of teased it open toward the back pages (because I knew enough not to get into the minor prophets). And it fell open to the first chapter of 1 Corinthians.

That is perhaps not where you would think to send a self-satisfied teenager with a head full of liberal doctrine on a quest for gospel truth.

I had grown up thinking the way to please God is to be good. And by that I meant: *Make the most of yourself*. Study and glean the best ideas from all the world's religions. *Cultivate learning*. Be sophisticated. Do good works. Above all, don't be narrow-minded, naive, old-fashioned, unlearned, or out of step with the times. I told myself, *There's a world full of wisdom out there, but you have to listen to the trend-setters, the celebrities, the beautiful people. In short, follow the zeitgeist (the spirit of the age)*. My highest goal in life was to be both cool and sophisticated. (To be perfectly honest, I knew I had little hope of ever being cool, but I was willing to settle for being sophisticated, which, being translated, meant that I wanted to be worldly-wise.)

That was my whole religion: I thought goodness was embodied in wisdom—specifically, philosophies gleaned from the wealthy, successful, famous, and elite minds.

So I wasn't looking to read more than a verse or two of Scripture. To me it was like a fortune cookie. I'd spot a verse and treat it like a private oracle. *What does this mean to me, in my situation?* I was reading the Bible like a pagan would read the daily horoscope.

But when it fell open to the beginning of 1 Corinthians, the idea came to me that I might try to read the whole epistle. I had never read a whole book of the Bible before—not even Philemon. So I flipped through the pages and was disappointed that 1 Corinthians was longer than I hoped. But I started reading anyway.

And right away, the Word of God attacked my worldview head on. Before I got past the first chapter, it seemed as if the apostle Paul had me by the throat. He starts out with a greeting, followed by a rebuke for people who were lining up in factions behind their favorite teachers. I had no trouble following Paul's argument until I got to verse 17 of chapter 1, where he launches a sustained attack on human wisdom that goes on for almost three full chapters. Verse 17, he writes:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

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.

I remember thinking, *I don't get that at all. Why would God be determined to destroy the highest of human achievements?* I would understand perfectly if God said he hated ignorance, ineptitude, and everything uncultured or uncool. If God said he was going to thwart everything stupid and vulgar, that would have made perfect sense. I already knew, of course, that God hates *unrighteousness*. But the apostle Paul was saying, in effect, that "all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."

Have you ever noticed how much utter contempt the apostle Paul has for human wisdom? Chapter 1, verse 27: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Chapter 2: "When I came to you, brothers, [I] did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom." Verse 4: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." And then the passage that absolutely demolished every religious belief I had ever entertained up to that point (3:18): "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.' So let no one boast in men."

Here's the short version of my testimony: I kept reading that night, thinking there must be some hope for me—some signpost pointing the

way to salvation that would spell out what I needed to do to get right. That phrase, "Let him become a fool that he may become wise," wasn't clear. "What must I do to be saved?"

And it was (of all places) chapter 12 where I finally found the ray of light I was looking for. That's where Paul is instructing the Corinthians on how to discern evil spirits from the true Spirit of God, and he writes, "I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit." I could not have explained the context of that verse or given you any kind of discourse on how it applied in first-century Corinth, but it was clear to me that Jesus is Lord and only the Holy Spirit can awaken a heart to make that confession. So I prayed that God would enable me to surrender to the lordship of Christ.

That was on a Thursday night, and before Friday of the following week, through a remarkable series of totally unrelated events, I was handed a gospel tract that explained the doctrine of justification by faith, I was invited to an evangelistic meeting where I heard an explanation of the atonement from Isaiah 53, and my life was set on a dramatically different course.

But it was those first three chapters of 1 Corinthians that first pried open my heart, so I have always had a special love for that part of Scripture and the truth Paul teaches there.

In seventeen years of Sunday-school instruction and regular church attendance, I never heard a good explanation of the gospel, and frankly that irritates me even to this day. I had always thought religion was the best and most noble pursuit of the human intellect.

My perspective now is that false religion is the worst of all evils—a more diabolical abomination than any crime or human atrocity you could envision. The apostle Paul had that same perspective. He too was saved out of a religious background where self-righteousness was falsely equated with piety. It's no wonder that he opposed gospel-corrupters with so much intensity. As a believer, he absolutely hated false doctrines, carnal confidence, and worldly wisdom.

And I am convinced he would hate with a fiery passion the drift of the evangelical movement today. In so many ways, the conventional wisdom among megachurch pastors, evangelical celebrities, and the leading church-growth experts today is the polar opposite of what Paul calls for here in 1 Corinthians 2. Today's cults of celebrity are the postmodern mirror of Corinthian hero-worship. The church today could hardly be more at odds with the apostle Paul's instructions for the church.

In fact, the tendency to make rock-stars, pop idols, and religious kahunas out of church leaders is precisely what Paul opposed in Corinth. Hero-worship not only caused division in the church; it also encouraged both the religious superstars and their followers to put too much confidence in the flesh.

Now if you've come to the Shepherds' Conference any time in the past decade, you have probably heard me say things like this many times before. I don't think I have ever spoken in this conference without pointing out that virtually all the fads and philosophies of fashionable evangelicalism are squarely at odds with the instructions Scripture gives to church leaders. Meanwhile, evangelical fads continue to come and go. Practically all of today's most stylish ideas about church leadership and evangelistic strategy are just transient expressions of the spirit of the age. Don't chase those fads. My challenge to you has always been: take Paul's instructions for ministry seriously.

It amazes me how many church leaders will devour book after book about innovation and the quest for "relevance" in contemporary church-leadership philosophies while totally ignoring what Scripture has to say about the subject. The Juggernaut of style-driven evangelicalism keeps rolling, and every word of caution or criticism about the latest evangelical fad is ignored or treated with scorn by all but a remnant.

I want to stand with the remnant, rather than floating along with the evangelical mainstream. I know many of you share that passion, and I thank God for you. I don't want to encourage anyone to adopt the Elijah complex. We *know* there are many knees that have not bowed to Baal, and we are happy to stand with them.

In fact, here's an example. The Cambridge declaration, the founding document of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, from 1996. The whole 3-page document is excellent, but I especially love the very first paragraph. It's short and to the point, and it sums up very nicely the theme that has dominated our Shepherds' Conferences over the past decade: *"Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith."*

There's a powerful echo of 1 Corinthians 2:12 in the first line of that statement, and that gets us right back to where I want to go with you this afternoon: 1 Corinthians 2:12-13. This text comes in the very middle of that three-chapter-long assault on worldly wisdom. To give you the immediate context, starting around verse 17 of chapter 1, Paul is denouncing the notion that the scandal of the cross is something to be preached around or papered over "with words of eloquent wisdom." He points out that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise," and that by God's design the church is not supposed to be like a country club for rich, powerful, and beautiful people—it's a fellowship that is open even to people who are "low and despised in the world." In the last verse of chapter 1, he condemns boasting. Then (chapter 2) he repudiates every attempt to attract people's admiration by the use of "lofty speech or wisdom." Then he disavows all the "wisdom of this age [and the values and tactics favored by] the rulers of this age." And he says (2:5) that all of this is not just to irritate the beautiful people. It's so

"that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

In other words, by the time we get to our text in 2:12, Paul is barely three pages into the epistle and he has relentlessly attacked every favorite tool in the 21st-century church-growth expert's toolbox. He rebukes the celebrity culture and all that goes with it—the factions, the boasting, the country-club culture, and the obsession with human personalities. He disclaims the entrepreneurial spirit and everything it injects into the church—a preoccupation with worldly ideas of success; an insatiable thirst for human cleverness; a tendency to tiptoe around the hard truths of Scripture; a craving for worldly approval, and above all the foolish notion that effectual ministry is something that can be masterminded by human cleverness.

Those first two chapters alone are sufficient to refute practically every major manual of church-growth strategy and ministry philosophy from the past forty years. Paul's vision of what the church should be is nothing like today's megachurches—built on some glib speaker's personal charisma. The apostle is expressly saying that no church should ever aspire to become a slick, über-stylish, big-numbers-oriented cult of celebrity. Making the unchurched feel comfortable was not part of the agenda in the early church. The apostles had no interest in gaining admiration or approval from those who were highly esteemed and well versed in the wisdom of this world.

To court the world's favor in any of those ways is clean contrary to what the church should be doing. *Why?* Verses 12-13: "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."

That's our text. The large point Paul is making is more or less summed up in 1:25: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The immediate point, then, is spelled out in 2:5: "that [our] faith [should] not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

The power that will open deaf ears and awaken the spiritually dead is the Word of God—not our eloquence, or cleverness, or personal charisma. It's *not* about numbers, popularity, special effects, or slick marketing. The *only* effectual power at our disposal as witnesses for Christ and proclaimers of gospel truth is the power of the Word of God, mediated by the Holy Spirit. The gospel message "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." There is no effectual power in whatever ingenious package you try to wrap the gospel in.

And that has huge ramifications for what the church ought to be and do and teach. Rather than striving to be as stylish and as sophisticated and as much like the world as possible, pastors and church leaders need to get back to doing what Christ commissioned us to do. That means

going into the world to preach the gospel and *make* disciples, not buying into the world and *becoming* disciples of the culture.

We're supposed to be distinct. We have a distinctive message to proclaim "not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Or in the words of our passage, verse 13: "we impart this [message] in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." Let's be honest with this: the vast majority of churches—including most who would self-identify as evangelical—are simply *not* being faithful to that calling.

But in these two short verses, Paul suggests three crucial truths that clearly distinguish true, biblical ministry from fruitless religious activity. These are marks of distinction that would set our ministries totally apart from all the cults of celebrity and pragmatic megachurches who think they are churching the unchurched, when in fact all they are accomplishing is the unchurched of the visible church.

So (if you are ready to write) here are three things to bear in mind that make biblical ministry completely different from all forms of worldly wisdom: One, the *source* of our ministry is different. Two, the *substance* of our ministry is different. Three, the *style* of our ministry is different. I'll point out those things in our text and we'll consider each one of them a little more closely as we work our way through these two verses. First

#### 1. THE *SOURCE* OF OUR MINISTRY IS DIFFERENT

Verse 12: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God." This is so simple and clear. The guiding force behind all true ministry is the Holy Spirit. The only way anyone can ever really understand the truth of God is if the Holy Spirit opens that person's eyes to see. And the only power that can keep us enduring to the end is the power of the Holy Spirit. So as believers, we are completely dependent on the Holy Spirit for every aspect of Christian life and ministry, and we should live our lives with an awareness of that fact.

Everything we do as Christians or in the name of Christ must be done in accord with the Holy Spirit, at His direction, and by His power. That's a comprehensive principle, by the way. Colossians 3:17 says, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." So if everything we do is to be done in Christ's name, and everything in Christ's name is to be done in the Spirit's power and at His direction, that means there is not one moment in our lives when it's OK to be guided by a different principle, moved by a different motive, or empowered by a different kind of energy.

And Paul is expressly saying that you cannot follow the Spirit of this world and be obedient to the Spirit of God at the same time. You cannot be obsessed with the *zeitgeist*, or the spirit of the age, and be obedient to

the Holy Spirit at the same time. The Spirit of the world and the Spirit of God are adversarial. They are antithetical. They have opposite agendas.

James 4 is very clear on this: "Friendship with the world is enmity with God . . . Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." John 15:19 Jesus said, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." First John 3:1: "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." First John 2:15: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you."

People apply all kinds of hermeneutical gymnastics to those texts to try to nullify what they say, but it's still clear (isn't it?) that our goal as believers should not be to try to impress the world with how much we can talk like, act like, and live like the heroes of the world system—the celebrities, the great scholars, and the rulers of this world. God is not preparing the church to be a debutante for the amusement and admiration of the world; He is adorning us to be the pure, spotless bride of Christ.

This is not a complex point: the contemporary quest to keep abreast of the "wisdom of this age" and to imitate the fashions of the current generation is precisely what Paul rejected. Much of what is justified under the rubric of "contextualization" nowadays is nothing more than sinful accommodation to the spirit of the age. If you have been paying attention to the winds of doctrine in the evangelical movement, you *know* this is true.

Every Christian with even the most meager knowledge of Scripture *ought* to understand that this cursed world is living on a short timetable. Everything you see around you, everything the world pays close attention to, all the fads and fashions and philosophies that drive the world have always been temporary—they change from year to year, or even more rapidly sometimes. All this world's treasures change hands constantly—and *none* of it lasts beyond the limits of earthly life (1 Timothy 6:7): "We brought nothing into the world, and [and it is certain] we cannot take anything out of the world." So this world's values are utterly *worthless*: "All that is in the world [is] the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. [Furthermore, both] the world and its desires pass away."

Even the most refined, sophisticated, noble values in this world are total vanity. In the words of Solomon, who had tasted it all: "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, *all* is vanity and a striving after wind." You're in 1 Corinthians 2. Look at verse 6: The spiritual wisdom we receive through the Holy Spirit "is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away."

Why would any pastor, church leader, or Christian lay person for that matter, want to follow the spirit of the age, when we have the Holy Spirit?

And yet, many *do* chase relentlessly after the spirit of the age. Lots of evangelicals think you have to do that in order to be "relevant." The church today is full of people who think the most essential qualifications for church leadership are worldly wisdom, worldly influence, and the admiration of worldly people. Pastors are told incessantly that the best model for their role is the slick, glib-talking guy with an entrepreneurial knack for worldly success—big numbers, shrewd marketing skills, a Machiavellian thirst for celebrity, and the ability to persuade lots of people to follow him blindly.

That's a lie from hell. I can't think of anything more out of step with the Spirit of God and more in tune with worldly wisdom than the church whose church covenant states that the "*church is built on the [private] vision God gave [their celebrity pastor]*"—where church members make a formal vow, promising to do everything they can to defend the main guy's personal ambition, because he claims it is a vision God gave him.

That's from an actual document published by one of America's fastest-growing megachurches. (They call it "The Code.") Not a single point in that church's "Code" says anything about the authority of Scripture or obedience to Christ as Lord of the church. But it does include some startlingly honest admissions, including this: "*We are all about the numbers.*" And this: "*We need your seat. . . . We are more concerned with the people we are trying to reach than the people we are trying to keep.*"

That's pretty much the antithesis of a true pastor's heart, isn't it? That's the philosophy of a squirrel hunter, not a shepherd. That's also the mark of someone who preaches himself rather than Christ Jesus the Lord. And that church's "Code" was literally made into a coloring-book so that kids as young as three or four can be indoctrinated with their celebrity pastor's personal agenda. It would be hard to imagine anything more out of tune with the Spirit of God or more in tune with the spirit of the world.

Listen: no church should ever be built on the foundation of someone's private vision. Christ is the Lord of the church and He is her one true foundation—and the apostle Paul says so in this very context. Look just one chapter after our text, 1 Corinthians 3:11: "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Christ is the singular rock the and anchor that determines the stability and the dimensions of the whole structure. According to Ephesians 2:19-20, you and I "are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

The pastor or church leader who views *himself* as the architect of a whole new edifice built according to his own personal vision has overstepped his role, and he is working *against* Jesus Christ and *against* the Holy Spirit. He is following the spirit of the age rather than the spirit of Christ. And don't kid yourself—the visible church today is full of vision-

casting wolves and hirelings who operate that way. Don't be fooled into complaisance by the sheer popularity of that philosophy.

I don't know how to say this any more plainly: the Spirit of God is *opposed* to the spirit of the age. Always has been.

In fact, there's every reason to think that when Paul speaks of "the spirit of the world," he has in mind a personal spirit—the devil himself. Satan is, after all "the ruler of this world"—"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." That's Ephesians 2:2, and in that same verse, Paul says the characteristic that marks every spiritually dead, unbelieving child of wrath is this: they follow "the course of this world," with Satan himself leading the way. "The course of this world" is the broad road "that leads to destruction."

Now why would anyone who truly has the Holy Spirit ever want to follow a *different* spirit—much less an evil spirit whose entire aim is to lead people down the broad road to destruction?

Yet I'm convinced that very thing is happening today in some of the best-known, most influential evangelical megachurches.

That is not hyperbole. Recent survey data shows the average evangelical church member does not know the first thing about the gospel. (Two thirds say they believe *some* good works are necessary for salvation.) Many have no clue who Christ really is. (A majority of those surveyed said they aren't convinced that Christ was really sinless.) And a large majority (close to 80 percent, by one recent survey) don't believe the devil is real.

It gets even worse when the surveys delve into practical matters. An article last month in the *Christian Post* says this: "Sixty-one percent of self-identified Christian singles who answered a recent ChristianMingle survey said they are willing to have casual sex without being in love, while only 11 percent said they are waiting to have sex until they are married."

Perhaps most telling of all: An article at the Barna Group website published almost exactly five years ago (April 10, 2009) has this headline: "Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist." No wonder people in evangelical churches are so easily enticed to follow the spirit of the age—the same "spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."

I hope you get the point. The spirit of the age is *Satanic*. It is destructive of both truth and morals. You can see that if you simply watch the drift of our culture. But that hasn't dissuaded evangelicals from aggressively courting the *zeitgeist*.

The evangelical movement is replete with churches where gimmickry has replaced gospel preaching—because according to the philosophy they work by, it is "all about the numbers." Even if the numbers have to be manipulated. The same church that made an oath of loyalty to the pastor's vision into a coloring book for children posted an article online

explaining how to produce "spontaneous baptisms." It's a step-by-step manual teaching the core leaders in the church how to motivate and manipulate large numbers of people to come forward to be baptized *en masse*. That same pastor will gladly demonstrate for you the technique he uses to make his sermons sound more "inspiring." He has the band to play dramatic music in the background when his sermon reaches an emotional peak.

That is exactly the kind of gimmickry Paul renounces here in 1 Corinthians 2. (Actually, it's even more lowbrow than what Paul was talking about. *Paul* disowned the use of eloquence and sophistication. I can only imagine what he would have said about the use of a deliberately emotive synthesizer soundtrack embellishing the drama of a sentimental sermon.)

Churches like that manufacture false converts and inoculate sinners against the true gospel of Christ. This is not just a bad idea or a faulty philosophy; it is Satanic.

And that kind of thing is filling the visible church with unconverted people who know nothing about the true gospel. I'll say this as plainly as possible: Most people who profess to be Christians, aren't.

Now, before someone misquotes me: I'm not suggesting there are no true Christians in the style-obsessed megachurches. I *am* saying there are lots of people in the biggest and best-known evangelical churches who have been duped by a superficial message, regaled by cheap entertainment, and lured into church membership without ever confronting their sin, with no true repentance, and without really even understanding the basics of who Christ is. Those people *think* they are Christians.

But they aren't. They are still following the course of this world—the broad road that leads to destruction. And their churches are the ones steering them onto that on-ramp. That's as far as it's possible to get from what the church is supposed to be and do. It's not "all about the numbers"; it's all about the *truth*—and you can't even begin to grasp the truth apart from the Holy Spirit (v. 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."

True biblical ministry *cannot* ape Hollywood, put on a circus, or thrive in the atmosphere of a bar or a comedy club. The power and pattern for true ministry is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God. That's the first major difference between authentic biblical ministry and all the phony substitutes: *The source of our ministry is different.* Here's difference number 2:

## 2. THE *SUBSTANCE* OF OUR MINISTRY IS DIFFERENT

Still in 1 Corinthians 2:12: "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." That last phrase is defined by the context: "the things freely given us by God" are the mysteries of gospel truth, starting (v. 2) with "Jesus Christ and him crucified." That is Paul's shorthand for the incarnation and atoning work of Christ; truths that were foretold and yet mostly hidden from Old Testament believers. In verse 7, Paul refers to it as "a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory."

This is not clandestine truth like some gnostic mystery that you have to learn from a human guru. It's truth that was mostly concealed in earlier ages but now is fully revealed in Christ. It is the reality that God became a man (fully human and yet still fully divine) specifically in order to die for the sins of the world to offer an atonement that would open the door to heaven for all who believe. That's what Paul means in v. 2 by that shorthand phrase, "Jesus Christ and him crucified."

That is the truth (v. 8) which "None of the rulers of this age understood . . . for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." In verse 9, then, Paul describes this hidden wisdom with a paraphrase of Isaiah 64:4, in these terms: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

So Paul is as explicit as he can possibly be: he is talking about the glories of gospel truth. That is the whole substance of our message: "Jesus Christ and him crucified."

It is a totally different message from the relentless self-help, self-esteem, self-improvement motivational talks (not to mention the public-relations lectures, campaign speeches, and fund-raising drives) that come from the average megachurch pulpit today. It's not about earthly politics, human philosophy, moralism, clever pragmatism, or sophisticated scholarship. It has nothing to do with what most people have in mind when they plead for "relevance." Those kinds of things dominate the vast majority of church services nowadays. And that is yet another proof that the spirit of the world, not the Spirit of God, is the driving spirit in popular religion.

Now, if you are a genuine, born-again believer in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. The very essence and epitome of Christian conversion is summed up in the giving of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God takes residence in every true believer precisely so "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

That's not describing a merely intellectual knowledge of systematic theology. What the Spirit of God does is open the eyes of our understanding to "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." That's talking about God's glory. And the result when you see it is: That's what

you become passionate about. That's what you *want* to preach about. I can't imagine anyone who has truly contemplated the glory of God wanting to uplift anything else when the people of God come together.

Every true pastor is consecrated and commissioned to preach the Word. Proclaim the gospel. "Know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified." We *aren't* called to be worldly-wise and style-savvy. We're called as ambassadors to deliver a message from God without modifying it to suit anyone's tastes. And as our text implies, you cannot do that and stay in step with the spirit of the age.

The spirit of the age says doctrine is an obstacle to unity, rather than the basis of it. The spirit of the age tells us that preachers who want to be relevant should studiously avoid say anything that contradicts what people already believe. The comfort and admiration of the unchurched is supposed to be the paramount concern.

Those are all satanic ideas. The true wisdom of God is eternal, not temporal; spiritual, not carnal; and transcendental, not earthly. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit, and "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." The "greatness" that verse speaks of is not measured by the size of the crowd we accumulate. It's measured by the timelessness, immutability, power, and ultimate triumph of the Spirit Himself, who indwells us. And the message we proclaim should reflect that. The only way to be faithful to that task is by faithfully proclaiming the Word of God, which is likewise timeless, unchanging, powerful, and triumphant. We have the more sure word of God, pointing the way to the glory of Christ. Why would anyone want to exegete pop culture instead?

So there you have *two* stark differences between authentic, Christ-honoring ministry and every brand of phony, false religion: One, the *source* of our ministry is different. Two, the *substance* of our ministry is different. NowC

### 3. THE STYLE OF OUR MINISTRY IS DIFFERENT

Bear in mind our context. The Spirit of God has opened the eyes of our understanding to the glory of gospel truth: Things which "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (v. 9). The Spirit has been given to us precisely so "that we might understand the[se] things[, which are] freely given us by God." Now, verse 13, "we impart [literally, we "utter"; we "speak"] this [truth] in *words* not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual [with] spiritual." The original Greek in that last phrase is elliptical. It means: "explaining spiritual truths with spiritual words."

That's the proper approach to ministry. Whatever "style" of ministry you favor, it should have these two characteristics:

First of all, *it must be Word-centered*. Did you notice the stress on wordsC"not . . . words taught . . . by human wisdom but . . . words taught by the Spirit." That's the Scriptures. The words of the Holy Spirit.

And second, any proper biblical teaching style *makes use of Scripture to explain the truth of Scripture*. Comparing Scripture with Scripture. Illustrating Bible doctrines with Bible stories. Using biblical language to explain biblical truth. It's a very simple, almost childlike style not marked by grand eloquence and flowery rhetoric.

Can I be frank with you? The apostolic style of preaching would not have been well received in the typical evangelical academic gathering today where every point must be carefully wrapped with several layers of disclaimers and qualifications; where every critique must contain enough words of praise to counterbalance every criticism; where collegiality is generally valued more than clarity and candor; and where complexity and ambiguity are often used to tiptoe around hard truths.

All of that is precisely what the apostle repudiates when he says in verse 13, "We speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit." His contempt for academic subtlety and intellectual daintiness permeates these first three chapters of the epistle. In 1:17 he says to package the gospel message in that kind of "wisdom and eloquence [would empty] the cross of Christ . . . of its power." you simply don't find the typical 21st-century evangelical craving for academic respect *anywhere* in the writings of the apostle Paul.

Paul was no publicity hound or hipster, either. From the way he describes himself here, and the way he defends himself in 2 Corinthians, it's clear that no one ever thought of Paul as a pop idol. He did not cultivate the kind of stylish charm and charisma that the world notices and admires. No one ever would have nicknamed him "the apostle of cool."

That's the title secular men's magazine bestowed on Carl Lentz, pastor of the Hillsong Church in New York City. Here's how that article opens and introduces pastor Lentz: *"With the Lord as his swagger coach, the 34-year-old pastor is turning Hillsong Church in New York City into a Pentecostal powerhouse and a destination for the in crowd. Drawn by his concertlike sermons and pop-idol looks, Lentz's fast growing flock of groupies includes Justin Bieber, NBA superstars, and young Hollywood celebs."* And then this secular men's magazine asks the million-dollar question: *"Whom, exactly, is this new apostle of cool seeking to glorify?"*

I think I'd resign from ministry and drop out of sight in embarrassment if a men's style magazine ever referred to me as "The apostle of cool." (And can I just say that I don't think any leading figure in church history has ever thought of the Lord as his "swagger coach." Bieber has a "swagger coach" too, by the way. For the record, I don't.) But the sad truth is that thousands of young men in full-time ministry would love to have an article like that written about them.

Then there are the *hipster* pastors—a subculture of unkempt 20- and 30-somethings who favor skinny jeans, weird glasses, scruffy beards, and so-called progressive ideas. Hipsters have become the brunt of almost every joke in secular culture. But evangelicals who chase fads

*always* lag behind, and hipster religion is still trending among evangelical young people.

This year's fashions will be followed by some other notion of what's cool as the fad-driven church presses on. Stylish evangelicals seem to love their own flamboyance far more than they care about lost souls. A lot of what's called "ministry" these days is mere spectacle bad performance art. It is precisely the kind of thing Paul condemns here in our passage.

When evangelical megachurches gave up the pulpit for a stage; when they traded psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for AC/DC tracks; when they hired vaudevillians instead of pastors; and when they turned away their ears from the truth to follow fables, they chose a path of apostasy.

The *only* way back starts with repentance.

Let me close with this: the public face of the evangelical movement today simply does not reflect who we are called to be or how we are called to minister. "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God." Our "faith [should] not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power." These are basic truths of biblical ministry. Let's allow them to shape who we are and what we do in Christ's name.