

Being a disciple who is wise and powerful (part B)

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[0 : 00] All right, we're going to have our Bible reading now, so if you want to grab out your Bibles and open up to 1 Corinthians. We'll be reading from chapter 2, starting at verse 1 through 2.16.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

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.

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this.

[1 : 04] For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 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.

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

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 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.

The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?

[2 : 17] But we have the mind of Christ. Is it possible? Is it possible to make our church family division-proof?

We think of all the differences that will have already arisen or will inevitably arise in the future, and wouldn't it be wonderful, given the history of churches, if we could say, yep, we can make our church division-proof?

Is it possible to repair already broken relationships, dysfunctional relationships with fellow believers, which are an ongoing source of tension, a barrier to fellowship?

Wouldn't that be wonderful? But it sounds unlikely, doesn't it? Especially when we examine our own hearts. And when we examine our own hearts, we find that our fears, our insecurities, our determination to win an argument, so often drives us to make self-protection, self-promotion dominant.

And in turn, that blinds us to what we have in common in Christ. Last week, I picked up the idea that you may have a genuine desire to be a useful disciple of Jesus in this church family.

[3 : 45] To be Jesus-focused, to be gospel-shaped, to be wise, to make a significant impact for good as a believer in this church family. But then, I said last week, well, how does that happen?

Do I actually have the skills and abilities to make that real, to deliver on that? Yes, I would love that to be the case. But can I actually be that person in this church family?

What does it look like in practice? And all that's very hard, because we know how easily we become rusted on to personalities, don't we?

It's just a plain fact that some people, we find it much easier to engage with some people over others. We're more attracted to one type of personality than another.

So how can we have a church family that's not driven by that as we look into the future? Well, Paul says in his letter to the church at Corinth, and remember, it was a pretty dysfunctional church.

[5 : 00] All these issues were big issues in the church in Corinth. But Paul is saying to the church in Corinth, yes, it is possible.

It's possible that all those things would be true. It is possible to be division-proof as a church family. Yes, you do have all the wisdom and power to be really useful in your interactions with people. Staying rusted on to Jesus while getting deeply and generously involved in the lives of others. Yes, it is possible. If only you remember who you are in Jesus, that you have it all in Jesus, chapter 1, verses 1 to 9.

And if you live in the light of that, chapter 1, verses 10 to 31. Paul said to the church, look, you're defined individually and as a church family by relationship with Jesus, not by people around you. Your blessing and security is in Jesus, not in people or how they respond to you. And then we looked at verse 10, two weeks ago.

[6 : 21] Practically, in Jesus we're already, chapter 1, verse 10, that is, in Jesus we're already knitted together in unity, deep unity of status, mind and purpose.

Just like a broken bone has been knit together. So we're stronger than the original bones. And Paul says again, that unity will flourish in a church family like this.

That unity will flourish when we live, we build Jesus' empire, not our own. It sounds so easy, doesn't it? Yet so often we find ourselves building our own empire and being distracted from the core business of building Jesus' empire.

Paul says it is possible when daily your old pre-Christian idea of being wise is replaced with God's wisdom, God's new way of thinking, God's new way of evaluating people.

Jesus-shaped attitudes as you interact with people in this congregation, this church family. It's all there for us. And today, chapter 2, verses 1 to 16, Paul's saying that sort of deep unity will flourish as we operate in God's power rather than the world's power categories.

[7 : 43] Paul's point is very simple. Thinking and actions are inseparably tied. When hearts are shaped by God's wisdom, which is a new Jesus-shaped way of thinking about themselves and about others, that will overflow, those hearts will overflow in a new Jesus-shaped way of behaving and treating people and interacting with people in the church family.

And that makes for useful and powerful involvement in this church family. Paul pivots from wisdom to power in chapter 1, verses 30 and 31.

Let me read it to you again. From last week, we looked at this, but we'll read it again. Chapter 1, verse 31. Talking about Jesus, God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Therefore, as it was written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. I think what those verses are saying is that the gospel shows us what really matters to the Lord.

It shows us the categories that are first-order categories. And those first-order categories are righteousness. That is, right standing and acceptance before God and relationship with Him.

[9 : 16] Sanctification or holiness. That is about renewing us from inclination to rebel against God and giving us increased desire to live to please God. Redemption.

Being forgiven. Being renewed. Freed from the power of sin at incredible cost to Jesus and the Father. Those are God's first-order categories.

Those are the things that really matter. The gospel tells us those are the things that really matter to God. And Paul's point is this. When the believers at Corinth, as he was writing them to Corinth, and when we fully understand that, then actions will passionately overflow with those very things.

That will be our shape. That will be our shape. That will be our shape individually. That will be our shape as a church family. And that's what we'll boast in rather than promoting self and seeking dominance or preeminence.

And Paul presses his point from two angles in chapter 2. Verses 1 to 5, first of all, believers are already equipped with God's power.

[10 : 40] We saw two weeks ago that word is dynamite. Believers are already equipped with God's power in and through Jesus. Now, again, Paul's argument is linked back into chapter 1, verses 18 to 31.

So if you look back to verse 18, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. That's the word there was folly, was moronic. The word of the cross is moronic to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. The wisdom of God. The message of Christ crucified displays all of God's wisdom and power.

That's a pretty incredible statement, isn't it? In other words, there's no more power, no more wisdom to be revealed. Verse 23 and 24, same sort of idea.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[11 : 59] The spoken word of the gospel of Jesus crucified is God's power to save and renew. a power that each believer in Corinth had already experienced.

A power that each believer here has already experienced. When you are converted, God's power is now within them, now within us.

If only they would realize that. If only they would harness that. Paul then details what operating in God's power means for him in these first verses of chapter 2.

Verse 1, operating in God's power actually determined his method. When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

In the days of, Paul was writing to you in Corinth, the way to get ahead as a clever speaker was to manipulate, to intimidate, to use spin or hype.

[13 : 26] Paul says, I refuse to use any of those things. I don't need to. I don't need to use those things to get the desired response to Jesus.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.

And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the spirit and power. It's not that Paul didn't try to persuade people.

If we read the back story of the church implanted in Corinth, Acts chapter 18, Paul tells us there that he did work as hard as to persuade people. The point is here that he doesn't think for a moment that his choice of words, the clear logic of his arguments or the smoothness of his presentation would save anybody.

Verse 2 again, looking back to that. Determined his content. The power of God determined his content. The life, death and resurrection was always the center and the substance of his teaching.

[14 : 48] Those things change everything. Verse 3, it determined his attitude. Paul was constantly aware of his physical, emotional, and intellectual inability to make anybody believe or get saved.

On the contrary, verse 4 and 5, Paul was confident that when he speaks the gospel of Jesus crucified and sees a person changed from the inside out, then the only plausible possibility is it was God's power at work in that person's life, not Paul's cleverness.

Understanding the power and wisdom of God changes the whole basis on which Paul lives and operates. And second point then is that Paul contrasts wisdom and power in the spirit of the world and the spirit of God, verses 6 through 16.

Now, these verses can appear a bit complicated, but I think it's quite simple if we know a little bit of cultural context that Paul's writing into.

So, it runs like this. Greek culture, Greek religion particularly, and Greek philosophy are all permeated with the idea of a secret higher wisdom and knowledge.

[16 : 12] So, in any one of the plethora of religions that was available in Corinth, the standard procedure would be that you would have an entry point set of beliefs, but then to show maturity and growth in that religion or philosophy or culture, then you would have to move on and discover these secret levels of things, secret wisdom, secret power.

and that was the mark of maturity. And many believers at Corinth had made the same assumption about the Christian life and concluded that to mature or grow as Christians, they needed to move on from the beginning focus on Christ and Him crucified and discover better, more exciting, hidden, secret, mysterious expressions of wisdom and power.

Paul's response in summary, verse 16, you have the mind of Christ, which is really a summary of chapter 1 verses 1 to 9 10 again.

There is no more to be discovered. You already have the mind of Christ. What more wisdom and power can be found? There is no higher wisdom, knowledge, or power to discover or attain.

Verses 6 through 9, each believer has already experienced both the sacred wisdom of God and God's secret power source in His Holy Spirit. In the end, says Paul, that's the only explanation why you believe and others still disbelieve.

[18 : 06] Others think the gospel is moronic. And says Paul, verse 10 through to 16, it's God's powerful spirit working in them daily, which enables them to evaluate themselves, to evaluate others, to form judgments about what's right and wrong and defend those conclusions before others and which empowers them to impart gospel truth to others.

You have the mind of Christ, says Paul. So here's the rub for these Christians and Corinth. The daily struggle is not to discover some new wisdom, new source of power, new aspect of those things.

the struggle is to live increasingly in the light of what you already have, the mind of Christ. The struggle is to increasingly express the mind of Christ in every relationship, in every interaction, in every aspect of church family life.

And make no mistake, unless you're different from me, I find it a seriously hard struggle to keep the mind of Christ, to be convinced that the mind of Christ is all I need.

Unless you're very different from me, then we so easily find ourselves chasing after the new next best thing, new things to explore.

[19 : 46] We get to feel that ordinary life, daily life, is humdrum. And we certainly look for new exciting things, new spectacular things. And we see it right across the Christian church.

We tire of what we have and we chase new exciting things concluding they're better. or more personally, we're asking the question, yes, I know I'm a Christian, yes, I'm so thankful that Christ died for me, I've been made new, but what new thing can I discover to make me feel better about myself?

What is there I can tap into that will make me feel more whole as a person, that will make me more attractive to others around me, to make me more useful in this church family?

Those sorts of thoughts tell us that to have the mind of Christ as we're thinking about it, to have the mind of Christ isn't everything, or it doesn't seem exciting or spectacular enough.

we think there's something just beyond us, if only we can get it then everything else will be right.

Paul pushes the Corinthian believers to say that the truly useful disciple is one who displays God's wisdom and power.

[21 : 24] Jesus shaped, Jesus focused, and that's in sharp contrast to what the world offers or considers wise and powerful.

Let's just circle around then back to my opening challenges about division, dysfunctional relationships, and having the ability to be wise, useful disciples of Jesus in this church family. They're the takeaway points for today. So the first one is this, on repeat, from the past two weeks. The gospel really is a radical new worldview, a new way of seeing the world, a new way of operating in the world.

And it's totally at odds with our old pre-Christian framework of thinking about who and what is important in Christ's church. And that new worldview, that new way of thinking, ought to overflow into Jesus-shaped ways of relating, engaging in this church family.

Now, Paul repeats it and repeats it because he finds it so hard to learn that lesson. we constantly think we can blend what the world tells us and what the gospel tells us.

[23 : 03] And we wonder why we end up in a total mess in our minds. We're trying to mix things that don't mix. Trying to have food in both camps, as the old saying goes.

second thing is this. We need to call out most division and factions in a church family as inherently being about power struggles.

Now, that might sound pretty negative, and it is pretty negative, but let me try and defend it. If I can't defend it, just write me off as Eeyore, as you would normally do. We recognize the process, don't we?

An individual latches on to some issue from the Bible, which they believe is a really crucial, fundamental expression of what it is to be a believer, or what it is to be a mature believer.

Then it easily becomes a lobby group where that person convinces others that maturity in Christ is to share their view on this particular issue.

[24 : 17] Then that easily becomes behind the scenes, or even in frontal assault, they start to take down anybody else in the congregation who don't share their views, or who push back against that

particular view.

And finally, a particular person who started it all makes themselves and their view dominant and preeminent in the church family. Now, some of you might think that's negative, but I can tell you now that people who've been around churches for long enough will recognize that only too well. People who have a view of the church and sometimes those trip points will be, or oftentimes will be presented as a wide variety of theological issues.

But again, while there may well be genuine theological differences, behind those sorts of things can just be raw power struggles. And the point I want to make here is that that process is common and oftentimes even convincing in churches.

But it's not God's wisdom or power if it's driving a person's dominance, if it's not Jesus-shaped and gospel-focused, but person-shaped and focused through clever manipulation.

[25 : 51] Brothers and sisters, two weeks out from my formal ministry here, I beg you, don't fall into that trap. It has destroyed too many church families throughout history.

And especially when you see things in this church family that you wish were different and even perhaps need to be different. By all means, speak up.

By all means, challenge. But make sure that when you speak up, when you challenge, you do so in the context of God's wisdom and power.

Jesus-shaped and gospel-focused. Not self-promotion. That's a hard one to do because inevitably passions and emotions get involved in those things.

things. I think, just wearing that application myself, I think Christian leaders are often guilty of exerting this sort of worldly power.

[27 : 08] It's easy for a leader like myself to use personality or perhaps a formal position in the church. church. I'm the pastor. And I can use that or could use that.

To bulldoze folk in the church. To bulldoze them into conformity. Or again, it's a real temptation for church leaders like myself to use a position to hide behind, to avoid what is a right and proper accountability to the church family.

Don't you challenge me. I'm the pastor. What would you know? And again, I've seen it all. And it's always ugly and destructive to God's people.

Leaders need to challenge people and motivate people, motivate change rather, using the power of true doctrine, accurate teaching, prayer. In other words, God's wisdom, God's power.

The final thing then is we need to act confidently to repair dysfunctional relationships, knowing we have the wisdom and power necessary.

[28 : 27] See, the gospel tells us in Ephesians, we're told in Ephesians, that the gospel was about creating one new humanity in Christ. It's about unity. All the dividing categories in our world are dismantled in the gospel.

If that's the case then, division and strife, which are just new dividing categories, must be the very opposite of what God wants for his people, and the opposite of spirit-controlled Christians, what they ought to be like.

therefore, my friends, I say this to you, to live with dysfunctional relationships within this church family is to live in denial of God's powerful, renewing spirit within us.

God's not serious. Now, how could we possibly settle for that when God has enriched us with both wisdom and power in the gospel of reconciliation, equipping us therefore to be reconcilers with one another?

how could we possibly settle for that when we can, each of us, both sides of the dispute, can bring to the table the mind of Christ?

[30 : 01] Because that's what we have to bring to the table. We have the mind of Christ. An extraordinary equipping, is it not? Very simple final question, but it's a profound final question.

Will we function in the reality of the mind of Christ? Will this congregation as a whole, this church family as a whole, will you individually and as the whole congregation, will you determine to be known as a group and as an individual who operates with the mind of Christ?

I'll tell you, it'll be powerful stuff as you guys step into the next chapter of this church family life, and I step out. Powerful stuff indeed.

Pray with me. Lord, it's such an indictment on us that for us who are new in you in the Lord Jesus Christ, who have the mind of Christ, so often continue to act with a mind of selfishness and self promotion.

Help us to see the awfulness of it, Lord. Help us to see that in Christ it doesn't have to be that way. And help us, Lord, to take action, to repair relationships that are strained and broken, perhaps some for years, to be confident in stepping forward and throw our involvement and commitment into this church practically, knowing that we have the wisdom and power of God to make us the most useful, wise, powerful disciples possible in this place.

[32 : 05] Help us to see that, help us to long for it, and help us to delight in it. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.