

The Getting of Wisdom

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 24th of October 1999. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled The Getting of Wisdom and is from 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 6 to 16. Let me pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it teaches us and inspires us.

Please help us to understand this passage so that we may be wise for you in this world. Amen. The world is full of wise people, full of philosophers, professors, scientists.

Politicians, doctors, lawyers and VCE students. And with all this wisdom that has been expounded over the past 2,000 years or so, it seems that the wisdom of Christians is almost outdated, outmoded.

[1 : 14] You see, the simplicity of the gospel message in many people today is irrelevant. Now, I'm sure that's not what the Apostle Paul would believe today.

And he certainly didn't believe that nearly 2,000 years ago. He said in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, to the church in Corinth, in chapter 2 verse 6, Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom.

Now, as I've thought about this passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 2 over the past week, it seems to me that Paul answers at least four questions about the wisdom that we do speak, which I would like to answer with him.

And I think it would be helpful to answer them in this order. Firstly, who cannot receive or know this wisdom? Who cannot receive or know this wisdom?

Secondly, who can receive and know this wisdom, which Paul is talking about? And thirdly, how is this wisdom imparted from God to this group, to people and so on?

[2 : 29] And fourthly, what is it? What is God's wisdom? Now, to help us work through this, it's a bit technical tonight, and I kind of make an apology, but I don't make any apology in the end.

I want us to look through the Bible and to help us work through this. So, open your Bibles to page 927 as we look at this passage.

First then, Who cannot receive or know this wisdom which Paul speaks? Two times in this passage that Olive read to us, Paul refers to the rulers of this age.

The wisdom we speak, in verse 6, is not of the rulers of this age. And in verse 8, none of the rulers of this age understood this or grasped it.

For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Why does Paul have this special interest here in the rulers who put Jesus to death?

[3 : 37] That's what he's talking about. Why not refer to the people who persecuted him as he's travelled around proclaiming the gospel? Why not refer to those philosophers that have laughed at him and scorned at him when he was in Athens, for example?

I think it's for two reasons. Firstly, a little bit of background about the Corinthian church is that it was being misled by false teachers who had caused them to be caught up with not only wisdom but also with power, the stuff that rulers have.

And you can see this if you go back to chapter 1, verses 26 and 27. Paul says to the Corinthian Christians, not many were powerful or of noble birth.

God chose what is foolishness, that is what is weak, in the world to shame the wise, that is the powerful. And you can also see it if you flip forward a couple of pages to chapter 4 in verse 8, where Paul puts in his own words what they are claiming for themselves.

Already you have all you want, he says to them. Already you have become rich. Quite apart from us, you have become kings or rulers.

[4 : 55] So Paul refers to the rulers of this age to show that the wisdom that can get one into power will not get you to God.

So that's the first reason for focusing on the rulers of this age. The second reason for focusing on the rulers of this age is because the rulers who put Jesus to death are probably the most vivid example of the fact that you can measure a person's true wisdom by whether they recognize Jesus as the Lord of glory.

If they had known the wisdom of God, that is, Christ is the wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. So you can tell whether a person's mind is dominated by the wisdom of this world or the wisdom of God by whether he or she acknowledges the crucified Jesus to be not a criminal who they accuse of blasphemy and all those sorts of things, not to be that sort of person, but to be the Lord of glory.

So in answer to the first question then, who cannot receive or know the wisdom of God which Paul speaks about, our answer would be this.

People who are so obsessed by the wisdom that leads to power and acclaim that they do not recognize Jesus as the Lord of glory, these people cannot receive God's wisdom.

[6 : 26] But it's not simply being in a position of power that closes one off to this sort of wisdom. You see, God has chosen to save powerful people and to give some of his people earthly power, hasn't he?

It's not rather so much having power but hunger for power that blinds a person to the glory of God that we see in Jesus.

It's not having acclaim among people but hungering for that acclaim that makes Jesus as he is unbelievable to that sort of person. Let me try and illustrate this for you by looking at a passage from the Bible, from Mark's Gospel.

And in this passage we see an example of why the rulers were blind to the divine authority and glory of Jesus. And we see that in a passage in Mark 11 verses 27 to 33.

Now it's going to be put up on the overhead and Ryan is going to read it out to us. So if you wouldn't mind doing that. Again the chief priests and scribes came to Jerusalem.

[7 : 41] As he was walking the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?

Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question. Answer me and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven or was it of human origin?

Answer me. They argued with one another. If we say from heaven, he will say, Why then do you not believe him? But shall we say of human origin? They were afraid of the crowd for all regarded John as truly a prophet.

So they answered Jesus, We do not know. And Jesus said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. The amazing characteristic of these priests, of these scribes and the elders, is an utter indifference to the truth and a desire to maintain their own image.

Jesus asked them a question and instead of asking themselves, these rulers and chief priests asking themselves, What is the true answer? They asked themselves this, How can we avoid being thought of as inconsistent?

[9 : 00] For if we say John's authority is from heaven, John the Baptist that is, then to be consistent we should believe him. And they asked themselves, How can we avoid being hurt?

For if we say John's authority was only human, we might get stoned. That's the essence of what's going on in this passage. We have pride on the one hand and fear on the other.

But there is no love there for the truth. They were more interested in being thought wise by men than in seeking true wisdom from Jesus.

And so Jesus says, when they can't answer the question, Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. In other words, it is possible to be so obsessed by wisdom that leads to power and acclaim that all access to the wisdom of God in the Lord of glory, that is in Jesus, is cut off.

We can be so caught up with trying to seek wisdom in this world and hungering for that, that we cut ourselves off from God. In answer to our first question then, no one can receive the wisdom we speak who loves power and acclaims so much that they do not see that the suffering Jesus, the Jesus who went to the cross, who died for our sins, no one can receive God's wisdom if they can't see that that Jesus is the Lord of glory.

[10:36] The second question that Paul answers in this passage from chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians about the wisdom we speak is this.

Who can receive it? Who can receive God's wisdom? Or who can understand it in such a way that it is welcomed and affirmed and not rejected as foolish?

Now in verse 6 again, Paul says, Yet among the mature, we do speak wisdom. These are the ones who grasp and welcome the wisdom we speak.

Well, who are they? Who are the mature? Verse 13 gives us the answer. And we speak of these things in words, not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

Now I think this verse, verse 13, refers to spiritual people who are the same as the mature that has been talked about in verse 6, who receive God's wisdom.

[11:50] Now if you look down into chapter 3, in verse 1, you will see there that spiritual people are contrasted with what Paul calls infants in Christ.

So in verse 1, And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. It's clear that being an infant is the opposite of being mature.

But in verse 1 here of chapter 3, the opposite of being an infant is being spiritual. Therefore, being mature and being spiritual are probably the same.

So one answer to the question, who can receive the wisdom of God which we speak, is the mature, that is, the spiritual people. But now, what is it that characterises this group and enables them to embrace this wisdom that we speak?

When Paul speaks, when Paul speaks of a spiritual person, he doesn't mean, for example, an especially religious person or a person who spends much time in prayer and reading the Bible and all that sort of thing.

[13:06] He means a person who is led by the Spirit of God and bears the fruit of the Spirit. Now in Galatians chapter 5, Paul calls believers to live by the Spirit.

He calls believers to be led by the Spirit. And he calls believers to bear the fruit of the Spirit. And then in chapter 6 of Galatians, in verse 1, he says this, My friends, if anyone is detected in transgression or sin or error, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

In other words, the spiritual people are the people in whom God is at work producing the fruit of gentleness, of love, of joy, of peace, of kindness, and those fruits of the Spirit that we see in Galatians 5.

And it's helpful to see here too that in Galatians chapter 5, again in verse 19 and following, the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit is what we call the works of the flesh.

And those sorts of things are things which we, in verse 19 it lists it, things like fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and carousing.

[14:37] And so the opposite of the spiritual person who is bearing the fruit of the Spirit is the fleshly or the carnal person who is doing the works of the flesh.

One is being transformed by the Spirit of God. The other is enslaved to their old self-sufficient nature which is what we call the flesh.

They're bound by their sinful desires, their natural human desires, rather than seeking God's Spirit.

Now this is helpful because when we come back now, we're flicking around a bit, I'm sorry about that, but when we come back to chapter 3 verse 1, we see exactly this sort of contrast.

Again, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as people of the flesh. Here is the same contrast as we've seen in Galatians 5.

And the upshot of this contrast is that we can now see in more detail what it is that characterizes people who do receive the wisdom of God. Namely, that is the mature or the spiritual person.

[15:49] They are the people who are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So a prerequisite for grasping the wisdom of God is not gained from a certain level of intelligence or even education or experience.

The prerequisite is moral. It's not intellectual. It has as much to do with what you love as with what you think.

it's not education necessarily but a word which is a big jargon word sanctification or holy living holiness.

That is what makes one receptive to the wisdom which we speak. It's not natural ability but spiritual humility which opens a person to the wisdom of God.

[16:58] in God's order of things you cannot separate holy living from the depth of your understanding. God has revealed his very wisdom but he has chosen to do so only among the mature that is the spiritual and that's not a religious elite or a pious clique but any and all who by resting in God's promises are becoming loving joyful peaceful patient kind good faithful gentle and self controlled and so on.

This is the person who will have a heart for God's wisdom rather than human wisdom. Now there's a confirmation of this in the letter of James in chapter three of James and again that's going to be put up on the overhead and I want you to as Anne-Marie reads this passage to us see how in this passage the wisdom of God is described in what I call moral terms.

Want to write it to us? Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts do not be boastful and false to the truth such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly spiritual devilish.

For where there is envy and selfish ambition there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable gentle willing to yield full of mercy and good fruits without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

so in answer to our second question the people who can receive the wisdom we speak are the people in whom the Holy Spirit is at work overcoming jealousy and envy and strife and selfishness and replacing them with the fruit of the Spirit.

[19:05] And those sorts of things are love and patience, gentleness and self-control and so on. These are the mature, the spiritual, the ones who see Christ in all his suffering and meekness as the Lord of glory.

But now, how is it that a human being, even a spiritual one, can know the wisdom of God? That's the third question I have for you. And that's the third question that I think Paul answers here in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians.

How can a person make such a high and exalted claim as to know the very mind of God? Verses 9 and 10 of 1 Corinthians give us the answer, chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him. These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

How can we know the wisdom of God? The answer is revelation. God revealing things to us through his Spirit. The wisdom of God would have never been discovered by humans on their own.

[20:23] It would never have never occurred to us. For as verse 7 says, God's wisdom is secret and hidden. So the only way for a mere person like you or me to know it is for God to reveal it to us.

And revelation is the act of God whereby what was once concealed from people is now made known to them. And Paul tells us something about this process in verses 10 to 13.

And here he uses an analogy. Among people a person's thoughts and concerns are only known to the spirit of that person is what he's sort of saying.

And only if he wills can another person become privy to what those thoughts and concerns are. If he desires he can reveal his thoughts.

So I don't know what any of you are thinking out there or you don't know what is going on in my head at the moment. But if you chose to you could reveal it to us, couldn't you?

[21:28] And so it is with God. No one knows his mind except his own spirit. And God has willed to impart his wisdom to us by his spirit.

Verse 12. Now we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit that is from God so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

Now in that verse, verse 12, there are two ways to understand who the we is in that verse, who the word, the words we. Some think it means all Christians, that is people indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Others think that the we is the person, the persons that God inspired in the days of the apostles, those who followed Jesus around, who then taught the rest of the believers, the early Christians, who taught the early Christians with authority and also went on to write the New Testament books.

Now it may not be possible to decide with complete certainty but I think that the second view is correct because of how verse 13 continues the thought of verse 12.

[22 : 45] And the flow of those two verses seems to go something like this. God gave us the Holy Spirit to reveal to us apostles things no one ever imagined and now in turn as God's inspired and authoritative spokespeople, spokesmen, we speak in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people.

So the way that we come to know the wisdom of God is that God revealed it to the apostles by the Spirit and they taught it to others who were prepared to receive it by that same Spirit.

So in our day the teaching of the apostles and the wisdom of God is given to us through their writings that we have in front of us in the Bible.

And that is the answer to our third question, how we come to know the wisdom of God. And the final question which I haven't put up there which shows the importance of all the others is this, what is the wisdom of God?

I think it will take an eternity to answer that question. We will never exhaust the wisdom of God no matter how much we discover. But from verses 7 and 9 we can say something, something very encouraging I think and something full of hope.

[24 : 21] Verse 7, we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden which God declared or decreed before the ages for our glory. Whatever else the wisdom of God is, it is surely this, it is the exercise of the infinite, eternal mind of God devising for his people a glorious future.

Jesus was meek and lowly, despised and wounded for our transgression, for our sins.

But he was the Lord of glory. And so it is with those who love Jesus. They may be despised, we may be despised and we may be rejected and even in our own world we may suffer, we may suffer now in this world.

But those who have a relationship with Jesus are the children of glory. Paul says in a letter to the Romans in chapter 8, he says, speaking about suffering, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

I want you to imagine a father, a tremendously brilliant father, whose son or his daughter is coming home.

[25 : 52] And all the brilliance and insight of this father is in the sway of his love so that every fibre of his wisdom will be employed to make his son gloriously happy.

And by his wisdom he knows every inclination and desire and preference of his child. He knows the joys that will go down, that will go down deepest and last longest.

He has all the power he needs to shape everything to his child's delight. Can you imagine that?

If you can imagine that, imagine what sort or what such a homecoming might be to you. Imagine that sort of thing.

If you can imagine that, you have an inkling of what the wisdom of God has preordained, has prepared for his children. What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor even entered our farthest imagination, God has prepared for those who love him.

[27 : 08] For those who love God, for those who look to Jesus as the Lord of glory, God has prepared for us a marvellous place in heaven, far better than anything we can imagine here.

Well, let me finish by saying, encouraging us to remember this. The rulers of this age who did not receive the wisdom of God, who did not see in Jesus the Lord of glory and the hope of glory, are coming to nothing, as verse 6 says.

They are doomed to pass away. They will perish. It's not for such people as these that the wisdom of God has promised and prepared a glorious future.

God's glory is for us. If we seek human wisdom, then God's glory is not for us.

Rather, God's glory is for those who love him, for those who cherish Jesus precisely in his suffering as the Lord of glory. And these are the ones who have ears to hear the wisdom of God and who will be glorified by it in the age to come, in the time when Christ returns, the time when we get there to heaven.

[28 : 29] So let us make every effort to lay aside all hunger and power, all hunger for power, and all jealousy and strife, and in meekness and in humbleness, open ourselves to the wisdom of God.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that your wisdom has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Father, we acknowledge that we seek human wisdom, but help us, Lord, to seek your wisdom, to turn to Jesus.

Help us to bear the fruits of the spirit of love and joy, peace and patience and so forth. help us to act as your people in this world.

Help us to look forward to that day where you welcome us into your glory. And Father, help us all to be obedient to your call in our lives, for we ask this in Jesus' name.

[29 : 42] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Jesus' name is angels.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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