

God's Wisdom Revealed

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[0 : 00] But last week we wondered, if the gospel is true, why is it not more impressive? A more impressive gospel, more polished Christianity, would actually work to save our family and friends.

Because why is it that when we hear the gospel, we think, wow, God, you're amazing. But when our family and friends hear the same message, they dismiss it as foolishness.

Or put another way, why do we love the cross, but our loved ones dismiss it? And I put that at the top of your handout. Why do we love the cross, but our family and friends dismiss it as foolish?

And we started to address that issue last week. We learned that God's way is totally opposite to the world's way. So God saves people through Jesus' death.

It looks weak to the Jews. It sounded like foolishness to the Greeks. That was verse 18 to 23 last week. Then he saved the least impressive group of people, among whom, verse 26, not many were wise by human standards.

[1 : 13] Or many were influential, or many were of noble birth. And God used a preacher who rejected the worldly methods of his age and adopted a style of weakness and trembling instead, rather than impressive speech and power.

And so it's no wonder then that some Christians in Corinth dismissed the gospel as foolish, as weak and unimpressive.

If this is God's way of working, no wonder so many of our family and friends don't believe. And Paul said last week that God has deliberately made salvation this way.

And the reason why was verse 29, so that no one may boast before him. In other words, God wanted to save people in a way that stopped them trusting how clever and impressive they were.

But only that they could trust in the cross. Verse 31. Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. And so part of our family's unbelief is due to their pride.

[2 : 27] I think that gives a sort of human answer to why they don't believe. But the rest of the answer, as we look at the Corinthians today, is the spiritual side of things.

And so that's our passage today. And if we could summarize the heart of the Corinthian problem, it is this. We are already so spiritual.

I think that's the Corinthian problem. And I wrote that at the top of your handouts as well. We're already so spiritual. See, the Corinthians have adopted a worldly form of spirituality.

And so Paul's aim through this whole wider section is to show them they're not as spiritual as they think they are. You see, they're a confused church.

They were focused only on the here and now. There's probably two reasons for that. So some of them claim there is no resurrection later. No afterlife to come.

[3 : 30] Some of them have been infected by the culture of Corinth. A culture that's obsessed with looking as impressive as you can in the here and now. Either way, the Corinthians had deformed their Christianity into being as spiritual as you can in the here and now.

We are already so spiritual. And so, Paul, we don't care about you. You're not from around here. This is sophisticated Corinth.

You're not impressive and polished enough for this city. I think we'll follow Apollos instead. That's chapters 1 to 4. We don't care about our bodies because we're so spiritual.

I think that explains why there's sexual immorality in chapters 5 to 6. Why some of them are abandoning their marriages in chapter 7. I speak in tongues already.

I'm sorry that you don't. I understand all the Bible. I'm sorry that you're way behind over there.

That's chapter 12. We're so spiritual.

[4 : 38] Arrogant. Self-censored. Self-righteous. Spiritually overconfident. And so, Paul writes this section to remind them that they're not as spiritual as they think they are.

Now, we are HTD. We are not messed up Corinth. They are there. They are long gone. We are here now. We're a good church. But we will glimpse ourselves in them from time to time. We will be tempted to react as they did. And so, Paul writes these words for all spiritual people. And that is us. And as we listen to Paul's answer to them, listen out also as we answer the unbelief of our loved ones.

And so, here's the handout. And as I said, if you keep your Bibles conveniently open just in that one page, that would really be great. And as we said, since chapter 1, there's an overarching divide between God's way and the world's way.

And Paul is building a gulf between them to show their completely opposite ways of life. And I've put a table on your handout which shows that.

[5 : 54] I did make a mistake though. Under the people, where it says people, under God's way, it should say not noble, not unwise, and non-influential. So, just so you know.

And here in chapter 2, there's a contrast between those who know and those who don't know. Between those for whom the gospel sounds amazing, like us, and those who think the gospel sounds foolish, like our family and friends.

And you can see this in verse 6. Paul says, We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing.

You see, in spite of appearances, the gospel is a message of wisdom. Paul says that only spiritually mature people will accept that.

And I think here he's giving the Corinthians a bit of a backhander. He says, I think he's saying, If you really were as mature as you claim to be, the gospel would sound wise enough already.

[7 : 03] Going for more impressive preachers, more eloquent turns of phrase, that's actually a mark of their spiritual immaturity. Spiritually mature people know what verse 6 says, that the wisdom of this age is coming to nothing.

And so they put no stock in it. Mature people know that the rulers of this age have no part in the age to come. And so mature people don't align themselves with the rulers of this age.

Verse 7 tells us that God's wisdom or his salvation plan is a mystery, that it's been hidden for ages and it's for our future glory.

But verse 8 says that none of the rulers of this age understood that. For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. You see, worldly wisdom cannot overcome the logical gap.

How is it that the Lord of glory could be crucified? The world's wisdom cannot understand that logical breakdown. And so the world's way always leads to a rejection of Jesus.

[8 : 17] But verse 9, however, as it is written, what no eye has seen. God's wisdom cannot be known by reading all the books in the library. What no ear has heard.

We can't discover God's plans listening to the cleverest of teachers because no human mind has conceived. Nor could it be understood by the wisest philosophers in Corinth or in Melbourne or the wisest minds of our time.

So I wonder if you know this. There's a machine called the Large Hadron Collider and I've got a picture of it. There it is there. If you can see in the middle, that is, there are people in the middle on that yellow thing.

It's enormous. And there's another picture, Barry. So that's what's on the outside. It's an impressive machine. And it was conceived by the best minds in the world, by over 10,000 scientists and engineers from over 100 countries, as well as hundreds of universities and laboratories.

And it is 27 kilometers long. And at 27 kilometers, it's the largest machine in the world. And all these impressive features are matched only by its impressive price tag, 13 billion to date.

[9 : 44] And it has annual running costs of just a lazy billion. Its own press release says it is at the boundaries of scientific discovery. Impressive stuff.

And the main purpose of the Hadron Collider is to recreate the conditions right after the Big Bang, when our universe was created.

prominent atheist scientist Richard Dawkins says that when we discover these things, we will have, once and for all, have no need of God. Amazing.

Now, if only they'd read chapter 2, they could have saved 13 billion dollars. Because Paul says in verse 9, have a look at verse 9, no mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love Him.

The deep mysteries of God. Verse 7, that God is our creator. That He planned for our glory. That He sent Jesus to save us on a weak-looking cross.

[10:50] God's wisdom is not discovered by our magnificent machines. Verse 10, these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit.

For our families and friends, no amount of their effort, no scientific discovery, no cultural revolution, no material success, will enable them to discover all the deep things of God.

See, worldly wisdom is found in all the philosophies of Corinth and Melbourne. It is earned through hard work and performance. It therefore feeds our pride and so will always regard Jesus' cross as foolishness.

But God's wisdom, on the other hand, is not earned but graciously given. So there's no place for pride but for thanks. Not a reason to boast in yourself but to boast in the Lord.

We, in this room, we understand God's wisdom. He's shown us the power of Jesus' cross. He's shown us that it's our only path out of perishing, our only way to eternal glory.

[12:06] Verse 10, these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. And so the revelation of the Spirit is our second point.

Paul says, in verse 10, that people cannot know the deep things of God unless the Spirit gives them access to it. Verse 11, for who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them.

And so just to demonstrate what Paul's talking about here, I'd like you to read my mind. I'd like you to forget that you're grown-ups for just a sec and call out answers at me. Don't worry. And what I want, I'm going to give you a clue.

I want you to read my mind but what I'm thinking of is something found in my vegetable garden. Okay.

Well done everyone for having a go. The answer is my son's Tonka trucks. He has taken over my carrots and my turnips and he's dug holes everywhere.

[13:10] Now, you could not have known that unless I give you access to my mind. In the same way, verse 11, in the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

He repeats this idea in verse 12. See, all people who trust their lives to Jesus are only able to do so because God's Spirit gave them understanding.

God's Spirit told us or taught us who Jesus really is. Christian people are spiritual people. verse 13, this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expanding spiritual realities with Spirit taught words.

I think the we in verse 13 actually refers to the apostles. Paul's message was taught to him by the Spirit. He says that he can pass it on perfectly because the Spirit teaches him what words to use. And so the apostles' message, that is, what they taught in the public square, their testimony about Jesus, the letters they wrote to the churches, it became our New Testament.

[14:32] It is the Spirit's words through the Spirit's people compiled in the Spirit's book. And so for us in this room, the apostles never, I haven't checked the preaching roster, but I don't think the apostle Paul is due to show up here any time soon.

I think he's long gone, but in the Bible, his Spirit taught words are preserved for us. So we too can know the mysteries of God.

So that through the Holy Spirit, we too can access the deep things of God's wisdom. wisdom. And I think it works like this. God downloads his plans and his wisdom into the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit uploads or teaches these plans to the apostles, who then testified them to the world and wrote them down in the Bible, which we access today.

And I wrote a flowchart in point two. God to the Spirit, to the apostles, to the Bible, to us today. The whole way through, the reason we understand is only by the Spirit.

[15:44] It's Him at every stage, and that's what the arrows, it's the Spirit at every single stage. Verse 15 says, for spiritual people like us, we make judgments or we make inquiries of the mysteries of God.

Unlike worldly people, spiritual people can bring the questions and challenges to God. We can discover how His wisdom applies to our lives today.

God has given us the mind of Christ, we're told, in verse 16. You see, the Corinthians had been judging Paul using worldly measures. Hence, he seems so unimpressive.

But he says the spiritual person doesn't need to worry about human judgments. God's guidance. And so the spiritual person has received God's spirit.

Spirit has enabled them to understand God's hidden salvation plans. They treasure the gospel because it saves them from perishing. They may look foolish and unimpressive now, but they're headed for glory later.

[16:55] You can tell a spiritual person, not because they speak in tongues or go on silent retreats or look the most impressive in church, but because they understand that Jesus' foolish looking death is actually God's power to save.

That is the Holy Spirit at work in them. I think that's the Spirit's main job, to point us back to how amazing Jesus is, to remind us of the things Jesus said.

Spiritual people learn to learn and trust in God's word. The Spirit taught word of the apostles available in the Bible. Spirit gives them understanding.

Basically, it's everything at the right-hand side of the ledger, of that chart. But worldly people, on the other hand, they do not accept the things from the Spirit of God.

If you're not a Christian here today, no matter what I say, you will not understand what I'm talking about. No matter how hard people try and reason out, the logic always falls flat.

[18:10] Verse 14 says, they consider it, that is the gospel, foolishness and cannot understand it because it is discerned only through the Spirit. I think it's like trying to receive a spiritual email with worldly software.

everywhere. You'll never get the message clearly. The worldly person looks for impressive things, for wisdom and power now. They adopt the world's wisdom that is doomed to pass away.

It's all the things on the left-hand side of the ledger. And for lots of us, that is our family and friends. Paul says that no amount of worldly wisdom will enable them to understand the things of God because they have the Spirit of this age.

They're influenced by the world's ways. You may be able to see that as you look at them, as you look at their lives. And that is a desperately sad thing.

We don't take any pleasure in saying that. And we'll think about our family and friends in a moment as we start to apply this at point three. But before we do, some application for us who are spiritual.

[19:27] Think about all the wisdom of this age. So scientific discovery, we saw that. The ABC, lifestyle magazines, the mum's blogs, Melbourne culture, what our friends say.

Think about all these sources of worldly wisdom. What can it say about the best way to live now? What does it have to say about an afterlife, if any?

Why should we be influenced by those who are in the dark? By those who don't have God's Spirit? What about life in the church?

Why should we judge our preachers based on worldly polish and elegant turns of phrase? rather than faithfulness to God's word? Impressive eloquence.

That's how the world judges its teachers and preachers. But the world doesn't know God's wisdom. The world is ignorant to God's way of working. It's in the dark.

[20:33] Think about areas of service in our church. When the world looks at our church and thinks about service, it says, what's in it for me? I don't want to serve with those people.

They're too different from me. I'm better than them. I don't think I'll do this job anymore. There's not enough public recognition. That is how the world looks at service. Why should we be influenced by the world?

They're in the dark. They don't know God's way of working. They don't have his Spirit. See, true spirituality is where the God Spirit has enabled us to see Jesus' cross as something amazing rather than something foolish.

So often I hear churches who say, we're a Spirit church. You're a Bible church. There's often that divide in the church community.

And I think it's a false dichotomy here. A truly spiritual experience is reading the Bible, spending time meditating on the Spirit-taught words about God's plans.

[21:43] Some churches in Melbourne will suggest to you that true spirituality is only expressed in extravagant gifts of the Spirit, like speaking in tongues, or true spirituality is going on silent meditative retreats.

But that puts them right alongside the Corinthians. These verses say they're not as spiritual as they think they are. And so as we finish, let's think about some application for our family and friends.

We in this room, we're not apostles, we said that. But just like the apostles from verse 13, the Spirit can teach us what to say to our family and friends.

We can trust the Spirit to be a better evangelist than we are. That doesn't mean that we'll be getting special revelations, our own personal messages from the Spirit like the apostles did.

We don't need it. We already have the apostles' Spirit-filled words. We already have our own testimony about what the cross has done in our lives.

[22 : 52] Last week we said, don't stop evangelizing your family and friends until you've told them about the cross. Because that is where the power is in the message of the cross.

Not in our worldly polish. That means we don't have to wait until we've built up enough of a rapport or friendship with them. It doesn't mean, it means there's no such thing as a right time.

The Spirit is the one doing the work. It means we don't have to work hard at looking wise enough or wait until we have the cleverest answers for their questions. We can just tell them what Jesus' cross has done in our lives.

We can just point them to the apostles' words in the Bible. And we can trust God to bring the power. And all the time we must ask the Lord to give them his Spirit.

Just as he gave it to us, we must ask him to be merciful to them so they too can hear and accept and understand and come to love Jesus' cross just as we do.

[24 : 04] Shall we pray for that now? Father God, we thank you that you have given us your Spirit. We thank you that you did not save us through our own performance, our own impressive polish, but through the cross of Jesus.

And we pray, Father, for our family and friends who are not spiritual. Please, Father, give them your Spirit. Please open their blind eyes, open their deaf ears, open their minds to see how amazing Jesus' cross is.

We pray that your Spirit would give them new life, that he would save them from perishing. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.