

1 Corinthians 2

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] and verse 12 1st Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 12 is on page 1147 in my Bible in my edition of the Bible and I guess many of yours as well 1st Corinthians 2 and verse 12 now we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given us by God in order to understand the letter to the Corinthians you have to try to understand what Corinth was in the Roman Empire it was in their terms a massive city kind of similar to New York although not the same size of course but relatively speaking

New York Los Angeles Paris something like that it was a major city one of the biggest cities in the world from BC 45 Julius Caesar flattened it from what it was as a Greek city and he rebuilt it again as a Roman colony and it had many many characteristics it was a wealthy city it was located beside the sea and any city that was beside the sea attracted ships from all over the world that came and stopped there and they offloaded their goods and they would sell and buy and then go away again and and so it was a great marketplace where people became very wealthy as traders but it was a massively immoral city and it's hard to describe without without saying things that probably shouldn't be said in a pulpit above the city was the Acrocorinth which was a great mountain 1850 feet high and on the top of this mountain stood the temple of Aphrodite the goddess of love and in this temple they tell me that there were a thousand priestesses who served there and as knight as part of their role they became prostitutes that was part of the culture of the place it wasn't just one section of society it was all over the place it was also a sporting city there were the Isthmian games the Olympic games were held every five years every four years and the Isthmian games were something similar except they were held every two years and they were held in Corinth so it was a place where you went to or where you lived if you were keen on sport and sport of all kinds athletics of all different kinds it was also an art centre there was in Corinth the temple of Apollo

Apollo was the god of music and poetry and Corinth was known for its love of music and poetry I hope I'm building up a picture of the kind of place that Corinth was and at the same time even although they were an immoral place where there was free love and free sex and you name it and whatever it wasn't wrong in their eyes at the same time they took their religion seriously except you have to understand that religion and immorality didn't really conflict with each other they lived side by side the gods had to be pleased and every ritual had to be obeyed and that included offering foods food to the gods before you ate every time you sat down to a meal you had to dedicate your food to the gods and get the gods to bless whatever it was you were eating and yet that religion was a religion that was divorced from your way of life it had no impact on your way of life their morals were boundless men had their mistresses openly and freely known to their wives and that mistress could be someone in your own family in fact as in fact we read about in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 add to that a population of 250,000 now that might not seem very much probably about the size of Aberdeen that might not seem a massive city to you but remember that the world's population in those days was very much smaller than it is today in the world's terms this was a major metropolis of all kinds and backgrounds it was a multicultural multi-racial city with people from all over the known world at that time and it was certainly the biggest city that Paul had ever been to thus far now imagine you were walking into a city like Corinth normally nowadays you fly to a city like that but in those days you'd have to ride in on your horse or you would walk and as you approached the place you would get a growing sense of its vastness as you came nearer and nearer to the city so it's not surprising when Paul tells us that when he came he came in weakness and in fear and in much trembling because Paul was on a mission he wasn't a trader he wasn't there for the culture or for the arts or for the sport or for anything else he was there for one purpose and when he went there looks like he was on his own

I can't I can't imagine how he felt we sometimes think of if you were to close your eyes tonight and think of the apostle Paul and all that you know about him in the new testament you might imagine him to be a thunderous a big thunderous preacher and as soon as you saw him you noticed him you heard him before you saw him and you felt his presence one of these charismatic preachers who had a loud voice and who commanded attention everywhere he went he wasn't like that at all by his own admission he came in weakness and in fear he wasn't a naturally persuasive orator rather he depended on the substance of the gospel to do its job in the hands of the Holy Spirit because he always said that if he had been the one that was responsible for the impact of the gospel in the lives of these cultures then the glory would have gone to him and not to

God but he was insistent that the gospel was God's message and it's the same in every generation the gospel is the greatest influence in the world make no mistake about it even today there are as we speak people in places that we've never heard of and they are listening to the same message and they are being impacted by the message and their lives are changing they are coming to faith in Jesus Christ all over the world right now there are people being born again they are coming to see that this is what life is all about however they've lived their lives before some of them have lived their lives in sin everyone's lived their life in sin for some people it's drug addiction for other people it's alcohol addiction for other people it's pride and jealousy and bitterness and hatred and ambition and greed they are all sin which one are we guilty of tonight and we'll probably if we really examine our own life we discover that we're guilty of all of them to a certain extent don't we well Paul was on a mission and as he walked nearer and nearer this great metropolis he had already visited several different places in the Acts of the

[8 : 50] Apostles it tells us the kind of places he visited there was Philippi first of all you remember what happened in Philippi how he had been lashed and he had been thrown into jail and how the Philippian jailer in the middle of the night when there was an earthquake in the prison how the Philippian jailer had threatened suicide and only to come to faith in Jesus and the crisis of the moment then they'd gone to Thessalonica which is another major city and in Thessalonica there was a lot of opposition he was abused and mocked and there was all kinds of trouble and stirrings and then in Berea and everywhere he seemed to go there seemed to be the Jewish people seemed to want to stir it up and they wanted to cause a lot of trouble and they wanted to get rid of Paul so that they would be done with everything that he was preaching and then he was in Athens the great university city of the time and Acts 17 tells us of the kind of conversation that he had with the Stoics and the Epicureans people who were philosophers and who asked some very important questions in life and after he and again the result of all of this was that many of them mocked him and not many of them well some of them believed so he's going from one place to another and every place is taking its toll upon him we have reason to believe in chapter 18 that Paul has been weakened by this whole process as any one of us we are mere mortals everyone has their limitations

Paul was not a superman he wasn't invincible he wasn't indestructible he needed encouragement and that's why we believe that in verse 9 in chapter 18 God says to him one night do not be afraid why did God have to say do not be afraid it was because he was afraid he suffered from fear the same as you and I I certainly would have been afraid in a city like that so he came he walked into the city of Corinth depending completely he's not a trader he's not a sportsman he's not going for any the reason he walks through the city gates is because he wants to share this gospel with the people how in the world do you start where do you start telling a city of 250,000 people the gospel that they've never heard of before what's more they don't have time to listen to the gospel what's more they're very sophisticated they're trades people they're all they all have their background and they're impacted by their background they've been affected by their background they're religious people they've got other things to do they've got a lifestyle which is completely the opposite to what

Paul was telling them where do you begin what hope did he have of impacting the city of Corinth with the gospel well two years later when Paul leaves the city of Corinth in the middle of Acts chapter 18 we read that there's a church that has been established and it's a large church containing several people many people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ was it Paul that was responsible for their conversion no it wasn't it was God who is always responsible for the change that takes place in a person's life well chapter 18 tells us how he went about this enormous task first of all by coincidence and I don't mean chance coincidence I mean God's providence God had somehow or other he had he had he had ordained or he had worked it so that there was a couple called Priscilla and Aquila who were in

Corinth who happened to be in Corinth at exactly the right time exactly the same time as Paul went through the city gates and the reason they were there was they had lived in Rome but they were thrown out of Rome by the emperor Claudius who had decided that all the Jews were to leave Rome and so Aquila and Priscilla had to leave they had to evacuate the city and they found their way to Corinth and there was the apostle Paul and so right away you had a core a team of people okay there's three instead of one there's three now what do you do now well Paul did what he always did he went to the synagogue where there are people with whom he could speak the same language there was a Jewish community in Corinth and Paul's philosophy was to the Jew first I'm going to go to God's covenant people first because they know all about the Old Testament and there are also people who are in the synagogue who are

Gentiles and who recognize that there is only one God so you go to where there is a common link or a common language and there he went and he persuaded he tried to persuade every Sabbath day Jews and Greeks that Jesus was the son of God then Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia his old traveling companions Silas and Timothy that's five of them so the church has grown from one to three to five but then trouble starts the Jews start stirring up again in verse six they opposed and they reviled him and he shook his garments and said to them your blood be on your own heads I am innocent from now on I will go to the Gentiles he turned his back on the synagogue on the Jewish people and he went next door to the house of Titus Justus a worshipper of God but guess what happened and this is so ironic as soon as Paul turns his back on the synagogue he goes next door to continue his work there guess what happens the ruler of the synagogue who he's just left is converted

[15 : 18] Crispus was his name verse 8 the ruler of the synagogue he believed in the Lord so we've gone from one to three to five to six it's growing all the time that's how God's kingdom grows one here one there it's it's it's it's the long haul it's the patient patient waiting on God and so it is even today we we have to wait for God's time and for God to do his own work and then many look at this in verse 8 Acts chapter 18 many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized things really begin to take off and it was then that the Lord said because it was obvious that Paul was afraid he still was probably suffering the effects of Philippi and the the sufferings that he had had to experience in different places

God said to him do not be afraid go on speaking do not be silent I am with you no one will attack you for I have many people in this city next stirring up was when they brought the matter the Jewish people brought the they reported him to the pro consul of Achaia Galio and the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal saying this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law Galio was having none of it Galio probably didn't think much of the Jews anyway he was having none of this argument and he just said if this was a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime Jews I would have reason to accept your complaint but since it is a matter of questions about words and names of your own law see to it yourselves I refuse to be a judge of these things so what happened then was that the law worked in favor of the gospel if the Jews had been successful in complaining to the judge then

Paul might have found himself in jail again he might have been beaten again but this time God had ordered things so that he would be set free so that by the time Paul left Corinth two years later it was a large church and well established but now things were really problems were beginning to emerge and come to the surface in the church Paul is now writing to them three years later and there's a huge amount of stuff to cover in his letter if you're familiar with the letter to the Corinthians you'll know that first of all there was division in the church some of them were Paul men and some of them were Apollos men and some of them were Peter men there was divisions about favoritism as to which preacher or which minister or which apostle they loved best others were taking others to court some in the church were taking each other to court and Paul has to address that in first Corinthians chapter 6 and then there was immorality creeping into the church in first

Corinthians chapter 5 one man had his father's wife he was living with his father's wife there was a continuous temptation to go back to the old life there were questions about what to do when food had been offered to idols the Lord's supper was a shambles some of the people were eating like gluttons they were coming together and they were supposed to be remembering the Lord's death they turned it into what they called a love feast and so that everyone it was it was like a feast for some and others in the church were going hungry and all in the name of the Lord's supper there were questions about women and head coverings there was a question about how or when or where to speak in tongues and what does speaking in tongues mean and there were questions about even whether the resurrection was real Paul had to cover all of these in his letter to the first Corinthians now here's what he says in this verse that I want us to touch on in the next 10 minutes and this verse says this we have not received the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from

God that we might understand the things freely given by God what this means first of all is that the gospel changes our way of thinking it's not a religion it's not something that we sign on the dotted line the gospel is not a club or a society that we join the gospel is something that gets to the heart of who we are and what we are and how we think and it sounds as if there were people in the church in Corinth who weren't prepared to allow the gospel to do this work in transforming them from the inside they were still thinking along the lines that they used to live in the old days before they had come to faith in Christ some of them were holding out they weren't giving themselves to the work of the Lord freely and totally with all their heart which meant that there was a question mark with some of them as to whether they really were converted in the first place following

[20 : 55] Jesus means a new life in which the old influences are killed off and there is a new way of thinking the way in which a Christian thinks is entirely different from the way in which the world around us thinks in Paul's day the world had their own way of thinking and doing there was a culture out there but for a Christian he lived in a counterculture and it's always been the same when a person comes to follow Jesus he comes into conflict or she comes into conflict with the way in which the world around us thinks in those days they thought along the lines of the philosophers of the day there were philosophers like Democritus and Socrates and Plato and all of these men had theories about how the world started and what a human being was and what the purpose of life was I suppose it was encouraging to think that they were thinking along these lines in any case and I hope you are too

I hope that you are asking the questions that go to the very heart of what we are what is life all about why am I here what's the world around us what is a human being are we just animals have we just evolved from ape like beings by chance without any reason without any creator is it possible to find out the answers to these questions how do we know what really is right and wrong is there such a thing if there's no God how do we know what is right and what is wrong how can you tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong and what is the meaning of human history and is there life after death these are the questions that

I would hope that every human being at some point is asking and I hope you're asking these questions and I hope that you never rest until you find an answer find the answer not an answer but the answer to all of these questions and the answer lies of course in Jesus Christ who said I am the way and the truth and the life the world out there will tell you something the Bible says the opposite that's what Paul means he says we have not received the spirit of the world and all the opinions of the world the world the way in which an unbelieving world thinks but we have received the spirit who is from God now I've asked the question already how was Paul how could Paul possibly share the gospel with these how could he possibly meet with the kind of massive challenges that a city like

Corinth would present before him well he tells us he said I determined in verse 2 I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified a message that was completely foolish to many people at that time and it's foolish to many people in our world today that's why be prepared if you're a Christian to be a fool don't become a Christian if you're not prepared to be a fool because that's what people will think of you they will marginalize you more and more and they will decide that you are an idiot for believing what you believe for choosing to believe a message which to them is complete nonsense for example if you're a

Christian you believe that God became man that God actually descended into this world the God who created the universe in all its vastness and its splendor and its unimaginable size the God who created that became a man came into the world in the person of the baby Jesus Christ you tell that to a person in today's world and you think you're an idiot you'll say that doesn't make sense and you go on and you share the gospel with someone and you tell that the Jesus grew up and that he he lived amongst men and women and that he died on the cross at Calvary and people say to you well that doesn't sound like God I mean God is the supreme being the God who is in control of everything the God who we can't understand is more powerful than we could ever imagine how in the world can you tell me that that same God who is supposed to be almighty and sovereign over everything and that same

[26 : 21] God is hanging on a cross in agony with his arms outstretched his hands nailed to a cross his feet nailed to a cross and he dies that just doesn't make sense well it's the same problem that Paul that's exactly the situation that Paul faced in Athens or Corinth or wherever it was the crucifixion the crucified God the crucified Jesus Christ defied everything that the Corinthians ever understood about God well in actual fact they didn't understand a great deal because to them there were many gods there was the God of love there was a God of war there was a God of poetry there was a God of the fields and the harvest and you name it there was a God for it so even the fact even the message that there is only one God for many people was a strange message and yet there was a power in this message that did its work and that transformed people as their eyes were opened and it's the same today

I would suggest to you that when it comes to sharing the gospel with people that we don't complicate the gospel with attempts to prove I'm not saying that we shouldn't try and prove the existence of God but don't spend too long on it I remember once maybe I've told you this before I remember before I went into the ministry I used to be in industry and I used to travel a lot and I remember I had an American visitor once and we were on a sales trip all around Scandinavia and I'd just been reading the books of Francis Schaeffer and Francis Schaeffer of course was a great apologist someone who was able to explain and to argue for the Christian faith so I thought right I've read Francis Schaeffer and I'm going to try and share this with this guy I was with and so we're in one city after another every night of the week so one time we were in Amsterdam another time we were in Stockholm another time we were in Sweden and so on and every night over dinner we would have this and he was open to it he was he wanted to discuss it so this was great so I was giving all the arguments or so I thought for the existence of God we got to the end of the week and I said right what do you think and he said to me I still remember this this is years ago I still remember it he said

Ivor he said all of what you have said make sense I can see why you believe in God I can see why you believe in the Bible it all there is a logic to it but for me nah and that was it there was me thinking that I could persuade someone to be a Christian by pure logic you can't do that because the only person the only way a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ is when that person comes to see the reality of God and Jesus Christ for themselves and when they come to see that they are a sinner that person needs God more than he needs anyone else and that the only way to be forgiven is to come to faith in Jesus

Christ who died for him do you see that tonight do you understand that God's message of the gospel is entirely the opposite to the message that you will hear in the world tonight do you understand that God's message that we are accountable to him that we were created for him that we are fallen human beings and that we are condemned by him rightly so because we have sinned and he is righteous and that one day we will all have to stand before his judgment seat and one day if we are stand condemned we are condemned from all eternity do you understand that God has done something about it to save us by sending his own son into the world to die so that we could be forgiven and washed and cleansed and so that we could be given a new life and so that we instead of going spending eternity in hell we could spend eternity with him because that's why we were made we were made for God and we were made to be with God

God's intention is his plan is that one day Jesus will come back again like I said today and that he this morning and that the dead will rise and those who have lived and died in Jesus Christ will go forever to be with the Lord that is the message that Paul took to Corinth it was an impossible message it was an implausible message it was for many people a ridiculous message God becoming a man God going to the cross Jesus rising again it couldn't be and tonight the choice is this either it is the most ridiculous message in the world or else it's the truth and I'm challenging you tonight once again to think it out for yourself and to ask yourself could it be that this gospel this message of Jesus Christ is actually the truth and

[32 : 53] God is that he is the way and the truth and the life and that by coming to him my life can be changed and I can discover what I am meant to be as a human being and I can have what he wants me to have the life that surely tonight let's just I'm just going to close the Bible then surely tonight you must be asking these questions don't tell me you're not asking these questions I mean it's your life so full of doing stuff of all the distractions that are available to us the games the apps the computers the laptops the movies on TV all that kind of stuff is your life so full that you have pushed God out to the surface is that right well I hope not I hope you don't think that that's what life is all about because it's not I'm I hope that you use your brain and use your soul and ask the real questions why am I here why was I created in the world what's the purpose of life because there's either no God in which case there's no purpose of life you are nothing more than an accident or else there is a God we're accountable to him we were made for him we were made by him and we will never find our fulfillment in this life until we come to know him once again and he has invited you to come to know him by coming to discover Jesus Christ for yourself please think about this you cannot afford not to if I wasn't a

Christian I'm going to stop here if I wasn't a Christian I couldn't I don't think I could sleep without knowing why I was here I would not rest until I found an answer to that question I can't say what I'd be if I wasn't a Christian I don't know what I would be but I think I think I would be the most restless guy on the face of the earth I would have to know I can't just accept that I'm here as an accident of time and chance a whole bunch of atoms thrown together meaningless random atoms I just don't believe that I can't accept it and I would hope that you too will not rest until you discover the greatness of God and you'll only discover him by discovering the greatness of Jesus Christ and discovering the love of

Jesus Christ that took him to the cross to die for sinners like yourselves and that you will come to do to to know what life is really about it's about knowing God it's about being reconciled to God and in living for him and when you live for God you really live let me tell you you really live as never before let's bow our heads in prayer father in heaven we thank you this evening for what you've done for us in the person of Jesus Christ and we ask Lord that you will you will lead us and guide us in asking the kind of questions that we surely need to be asking and we pray that we will never rest until we find a rest in you in Jesus name amen we're going to sing now in Psalm 86 and we're going to sing the and that's the traditional version of the psalm it's on page 341 and it's verse 9 and to verse 12 four stanzas Psalm 86 is the traditional Scottish

Psalter versions verse 9 all nations whom thou made shall come and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four stand and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four all nations whom thou made shall come and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four stand and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four our name shall glorify 9 to 12 four stand and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four stand and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four glorify 9 to 12 four and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four and worship reverently before thy face and they oh Lord thy name shall glorify 9 to 12 four mark X did 16 marks beber cortisol Ras sollic descriptionsiguers and words Shri Isfati sorbred spirit fils fairya

And in thy truth, O Lord, then walk with I.

[38 : 37] Unite my heart, and I like it, make me here continually.

O Lord, my God, with all my heart, to thee I will give praise.

And I, the glory with us, cry unto thy name always.

Our God and Father, we thank you for our time together, for our fellowship around your word. We pray that you will bless that word abundantly and mightily to each one of us and open up our hearts to hear your voice speaking personally to us and calling us to yourself.

We pray that you will take us, that you will bless our time of fellowship, our informal fellowship. We pray that you will bless the food to us. We thank you for it and for those who have prepared it so graciously and so kindly for us.

[39 : 59] And we pray that you will continue with us. And may your grace and your mercy and your peace from Father, Son, and Spirit be ours. In Jesus' name, amen.