

God's Wisdom Revealed

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

BPC – 6/3/2022 – 5pm

When I first started running the youth group here at Bundy I bought a book on youth ministry as I thought I better learn as much as I could. And the book started by describing different models and approaches to youth group. And as I read I came to exactly what we were doing.

The classic youth group in a community hall. Plenty of food, solid 90 minutes of games and high energy activity, then a short devotion to finish. And as I read it in the book I was pretty chuffed. That's what we do! We are literally doing it by the book! Now to sit back and watch the revival!

But my glee was short lived when the author went on say, "the problem with this model of youth ministry is that it's kind of like spiking a drink..." It's a bait and switch approach – win them over the fun, stuff them full of food, so they'll have to sit and listen to the bible part.

It's deceptive yes, but worst of all, it says you have no confidence in the Gospel at all – as if Jesus needs you to soften the blow before introducing him.

And this is a tension that Christians have often felt when it comes to talking about Jesus. We need to be really friendly, build a good connection first so they we aren't that weird, not that crazy when it comes to actually talking about Jesus and his death and resurrection.

And it seems this is exactly the tension the Corinthians are feeling as they saw how foolish the message of the cross is to the world. That's what Paul unpacked in 1:18 onwards: the cross is foolishness to the world and God is pleased to use this message to call people who aren't wise or impressive, like the Corinthians, and even use weak and unimpressive preachers like Paul.

And so the Corinthians feel the tension and start to wonder, what if we just improved the message a bit? Made it a bit more compelling or even a bit less offensive and only use people who make it a bit more engaging. Surely that will win more people and also make us seem less crazy!

And so our passage tonight comes as an important corrective as Paul says while the message of the cross, the good news about Jesus, is foolishness to the world, don't think it actually is foolish. We don't need to soften it, change, hide it, or improve, but see it for what it is, God's wisdom!

And I think that's why Paul begins in v.6 with a subtle rebuke: ⁶ *We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*

Maturity sees the message of the cross as wisdom, regardless of what the world sees. And it's subtle rebuke because the Corinthians almost would have seen themselves as mature. They were spiritual, gifted, gathered around impressive speakers that others wanted to hear.

But Paul says maturity is not about improving the cross or certainly not moving beyond it, but clinging to it as God's wisdom. And Paul is not trying to create a hierarchy as if the mature are a special class of Christian or even more Christian. Maturity is what all believers can be and should strive to be.

We see this in Colossians 1 where Paul explains his ministry this way: ²⁸ *We proclaim him [Christ], warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

So maturity is about seeing the Gospel rightly, as God's wisdom, and then having it shape all of your life. What he calls the *mind of Christ* in v.16. Where everything is for Jesus and like Jesus. Because while the world sees it as foolish, the cross is true wisdom. We see this as Paul contrasts it with the wisdom of the world: v.6 *not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.* Human wisdom has an expiration date. It can only take you so far.

Paul is not against human wisdom or anti-intellectual. The point is not you need to turn off your brain and just accept everything. Human wisdom can split the atom, put men on the moon, create artificial intelligence, but it cannot tell you about God – of such things we ignorant.

No genius, computer or telescope can give you that. Human wisdom can't tell us about God or what he's like or how we can know him. Quite the opposite! Human wisdom got it so wrong that when the God of the universe who made us, the God of love and beauty and majesty condescended and stepped into the world to offer life to the full, hope, and relationship with himself, we killed him.

⁸ *None of the rulers of this age knew this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

Human wisdom is self-seeking and pretentious, it rejects God, replaces God, even invents gods. It is all about us, human achievement. But God's wisdom, his true wisdom, is different.

⁷ *On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory.*

God's wisdom is hidden – yes it was promised through the OT, but it was truly revealed in the coming of Christ. That's what *mystery* in v.7 means, not that God's wisdom is mysterious but that it needed to be revealed, like a secret waiting to be shared which it has been in the coming of Jesus.

And this plan, this wisdom, was God's idea before the creation of the world. Before the world existed God had resolved to send his Son into the world to die, to bring sinners to himself. God's wisdom is what our world was made for, wisdom that we flourish in when we get it and live by it.

And it really is true wisdom. Did you hear the contrast? Human wisdom kills the Lord of glory in v.8, God's wisdom gives glory. His hidden wisdom in v.7 is for *our glory*. Isn't that profound?

God's wisdom is good news – so much better than what we'd guess or even imagine. That's why Paul quotes Isaiah 64 in v.9, ***What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived— God has prepared these things for those who love him.***

In Isaiah 64 God's people are crying out for mercy, mercy from God because they have sinned. Rejected God and become unclean. They have nothing to offer him, they are facing judgement and long for deliverance. Yet they know that God's ways are not like theirs.

And as people who have seen God's wisdom revealed in the coming of Jesus, in the cross, we have seen God's answer: He has shown us mercy, cleansed us from all unrighteousness, given us hope and eternal life, and all by taking the punishment our sin deserved on himself.

And that now through his death in our place, the risen Jesus unites us to himself, we are seated in heaven with the hope of glory at his coming when he makes all things new and wipes away all our tears and there is no war, no pandemics, no sickness, and no death.

God's wisdom is good news – what no human heart has conceived God has prepared for those who love him. So you can see how foolish, how horrible, the thought of thinking we can take human wisdom and improve the Gospel. How unnecessary it is to hide or change that Gospel.

The Gospel shows us the heart and character of God who reconciles a sinful world to himself through his Son, and God is pleased to reveal his wisdom through his Spirit. ¹⁰ *Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.*

In vv.10-16 Paul outlines that God's hidden wisdom has been revealed not only in the coming of Christ, but to all who believe by the Spirit. The Spirit, his reality and work is the focus in these verses because the work of the Spirit is inseparable from the work of God revealed in Christ.

There is a sense in which someone cannot truly reveal themselves to someone else, unless they know themselves. And because the Spirit searches *even the depths of God* he is uniquely able to reveal God.

To truly know God we are utterly dependent on God to reveal himself to us. That's why Paul illustrates the point from a human example in v.11, *For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him?*

If I was to ask you what the person sitting next to you right now was thinking, what would you say? "This is a captivating sermon! He makes 40 minutes feel like 4!" Or for those more distracted, "That kebab for dinner is sounding so good right now..." Or possibly, "That kebab at lunch isn't sitting so well right now..."

You'll have to ask them afterwards if you were right. But the point is you're guessing, you cannot know. You might even get it right, but you would still only know if the person reveals it to you.

To know God, to know his hidden wisdom, it must be revealed to us. Hence why after the illustration v.11 continues, *In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

And the Spirit is not simply part of God like his conscience, he is himself God, the third person of the Trinity, who is yet distinct from both the Father and the Son, is sent out to reveal God's wisdom.

To know God he must reveal himself and he has chosen to do so by his Spirit. And this might be hard for us to grasp. Our world is driven by the search for knowledge. We value, take pride in, even judge based on knowledge or education... You've probably heard it or perhaps even thought it...

I would have gone to RMIT too if I hadn't got into Melbourne of course... Oh you're arts student, that's nice... I was going to take a gap year but after getting a 99 ATAR I just couldn't let uni down.

Our thirst to know and explore goes from the atom to outer space and so the conclusion then is that it is on us to discover and decide about God.

And so it is absolute human wisdom and arrogance on full display when we think we can decide what God is like, what God should or shouldn't value or do. I recently RSVP'd for a wedding which of course included the request for any dietary requirements.

But imagine if instead of requesting the information the couple sat down and just guessed. They looked at the names on the invite and said, "you know to me, Andrew looks like a vegan..." It would be utterly absurd right! And very wrong!! But how much more absurd to think we can decide what God is like without him revealing it to us. It's human arrogance that thinks it can decide.

And this creeps in all the time, even amongst Christians when you hear the classic, "I don't like to think of God as..." Insert any number of things! As judging anyone. Letting bad things happen.

And so not only are we fully dependent on God to reveal himself God has taken the initiative to reveal himself by the Spirit. God actually desires that we know him not live in the fruitless speculation that leaves us with a disappointing god we invented and without hope!

But there is an actually an order and progress of thought of *how* the Spirit reveals God to us in vv.12-16 that the arrows in your handout suggest. And the flow really depends on how we understand the use of 'we' and 'us' in these verses.

And so while it is true that every believer receives the Spirit of God and knows God as we'll see in vv.15-16, the apostles like Paul had a unique role and privilege in explaining the Gospel, the meaning and purpose of Christ's death and resurrection as the Spirit worked in and through them – and now through them to all believers.

That's what we see in v.12 as the apostles are given understanding of what God has done, who then teach the wisdom of God in v.13 by the Spirit, that then is either rejected or understood by the individual in vv.14-16 as the Spirit works through the apostolic preaching.

¹² *Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God.*

The *spirit of the world* is another way of saying human wisdom that is in opposition to God. The apostles did not come to their understanding and teaching about Jesus' death and resurrection by their human intellect but through the Spirit of God that gave them understanding.

The Gospel of grace, what God has freely given to us through Jesus was entrusted to the apostles. Paul says similar in Ephesians 3:4, ⁴ *By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.* ⁵ *This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*

And having received understanding by the Spirit, the Spirit then continued to work through them as the apostles spoke, wrote, and taught. ¹³ *We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.*

The apostles taught the Gospel as they travelled from town to town as we read in Acts, but also in what they wrote down, their letters, like 1Corinthians that we are reading now. But notice that Paul is confident that his words are not merely human words and wisdom, but words *taught by the Spirit*.

This is what it is called the dual authorship of the bible – because the bible is unashamedly a human book, written by people in history at different times and situations. But the bible is also God’s Word, breathed out by God as he works through these human authors by the Holy Spirit.

It’s what we mean when we say the bible is ‘inspired by God’ - his very words through human authors. And this is something that Jesus said would happen.

In John 14-16, Jesus is in the upper room the night before his crucifixion with the disciples as he prepares them for his imminent death. And he promises them the coming of the Spirit to guide them and then work through them.

John 15:²⁶ *“When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you [the apostles] from the Father — the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

The Spirit testifies to the apostles, the apostles testify as those entrusted with understanding of what God has done in and through Jesus, as those uniquely with Jesus from the beginning.

Now this might all seem a bit trivial to you but it is so important. It actually protects us from thinking that knowing God is this personal and private venture that we can go about however we like and come to whatever conclusion we like as God can be different for certain people.

We live in time where the word ‘truth’ is almost always preceded by the word ‘my’. ‘My truth’ is about my take on things, that I’m comfortable with, what I’ve decided is the case. But knowing God can never be like that. If anything it’s why our world and culture are so uncomfortable with the bible.

And so while God revealing himself, his wisdom to us is good news and beyond our comprehension in v.9, it does not, it will not just affirm our existing thoughts and feelings or leave us unchallenged and unchanged. 1Corinthians is going to show us this time and time again.

J.I Packer says in his great book, *Knowing God*, “God’s wisdom is not, and never was, pledged to keep a fallen world happy, or to make ungodliness comfortable. Not even to Christians has he promised a trouble-free life; rather the reverse. He has other ends in view for life in this world than simply to make life easy for everyone.”

A view of God that never challenges us, never changes us, and merely affirms what we already think or do, is just a God of our own imagination and invention. And so to truly know God and be his people we must be committed to what God has revealed through the apostles.

And in an age of podcasts and youtube and many churches or preachers to choose from, we should make sure that every sermon requires bibles open. It's why we are committed to working through whole books of the bible – not picking and choosing the parts that are nice.

And it's what you should be committed to, knowing God, listening to God, through the apostolic witness God has persevered for us. The Spirit was at work through the apostles as they taught, and continues to work in us as he gives us understanding.

We see that at the end of v.13, the apostles *explain spiritual things to spiritual people*. Understanding God's Word, knowing God, is the work of the Spirit from start to finish. The Spirit must enable us individually to grasp what is written down so we can know God ourselves.

Paul makes that clear in vv.14-16 as he contrasts the person without the Spirit to the one who has the Spirit. ¹⁴ *But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.*

Without the Spirit, God's Word is foolishness. Now this is not to say that an unbeliever won't get or understand what Jesus has done. They will, they can probably summarise the story and tell you why Jesus died as most Australians probably could.

But without the Spirit, understanding the Gospel that leads them to actually know and enjoy and trust God is impossible. No Spirit, no true understanding. No Spirit, no conversion.

And this is helpful as it explains what for most of us is a common experience. We cannot persuade people to love what we love – this has sadly been my experience with my love of Transformers...

But we cannot persuade people to see God the way we do. The Spirit must work to reveal God. And so the only reason a Christian knows and trusts God is because he has taken the initiative to open our eyes and enable us to savour Christ through the Gospel.

And so it should go without saying that there is absolutely no room for pride or arrogance when it comes to our knowledge of God – for what do we have, what do we know, that we did not receive?

Now this of course doesn't mean we shouldn't work at our understanding of God or be committed to reading God's Word, quite the opposite. The presence and work of the Spirit humbles us but also drives us into God's Word to be captured more and more by it. We see that in v.15.

¹⁵ *The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone.*

By 'evaluate everything' Paul does not mean that believers will be able to comprehend all of reality. It's that as the Spirit works in us to give us understanding and knowledge of God, we can then assess reality and experiences and our world through that understanding.

The Spirit works in us to have a biblical worldview, to process life through the lenses of the Gospel. We get to evaluate and process all of life through God's Word which really is a privilege and comfort.

Whether pandemic or war, loneliness or marriage, promotion or unemployment, we can process and understand it not with worldly wisdom but God's. We process the ups and downs of life through God's Word which gives us true perspective and hope and comfort.

And this is especially the case when life is costly or hard or lonely specifically because of our trust in Jesus. That's what Paul means when he says the believer is not *evaluated by anyone*. Or what the NIV helpfully fleshes out, *is not subject to merely human judgements*.

Because having God's Spirit brings about a total change, change of allegiance and values, change of worldview and behaviour, the life of a Christian will often be a total mystery to the unbeliever. Our lives will seem irrational or foolish or even offensive to unbelievers – but their assessment of us does not change our reality.

The Corinthians felt this tension of being awkward and different from their culture. A tension that so many of us have or will have. Yet we can expect their confusion and at times hostility which will actually affirm us that God is at work in us by his Spirit. That's why Paul finishes with a quote from Isaiah 40 in v.16. ***who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct him?***

The expected answer is no right? In fact the whole section where the quote comes is stressing the absolute gulf between God and us. God can measure the water of the earth in the hollow of his hand, God consulted no one, needed no one, in making the world. He is bigger and better than we imagine!

The world cannot know God's mind and Paul knows the presumed answer is no one - yet he concludes in v.16, *But we have the mind of Christ*.

In God's kindness, by God's Spirit, we have actually come to know God, received his hidden wisdom! And so as we feel the tension of being different from the world around us, as we are often at odds over what we value or do, the answer is not hide or change your Christianity but go deeper into it.

To have the mind of Christ is to know God and then see the world through what he has done in Christ, what we have through Christ. Paul finishes on this wonderful reality of having the mind of Christ to encourage us because it will sustain us through that tension and even give us confidence.

Having the mind of Christ liberates us from shrinking away in awkwardness or changing the Gospel out of fear of rejection or the delusion of thinking we can improve it to win people over.

To have the mind of the Christ is to be able to say you have come to know God himself, to know his love and power and presence, that you've been caught up in his purposes for the world through Jesus, and all of it as a gift to you by God's Spirit. It's a reality and perspective that changes everything.

That's what we are going to see over the next chapters of 1Corinthians as the mind of Christ should transform our whole identity: protecting us from foolish divisions or destructive selfishness, protect us against idolatry and sexual immorality. Nothing is left unchanged by having the mind of Christ.

Which leads us to do two important things: to pray and seek. Prayer must be our first and foremost response, not simply to thank God but because we know we are entirely dependent on God's Spirit.

Pray that God would give us understanding and depths of insight as we come to his Word. This is why we begin our sermons with prayer: not as some mere formality/tradition but because my ability to understand & teach God's Word just like your ability to comprehend it is entirely dependent on God!

In his book *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, John Piper describes prayer as 'indispensable'. But prayer does make us passive but actually gives us confidence. He says, "This is how we are supposed to read the Bible. We will and work because God is willing and working in us. We work with all our natural powers to see the meaning of the inspired writings, because God is at work in us to open our minds to see the glory that is really there."

That God reveals himself by his Spirit ought to lead us to pray and seek – to come to God longing to know, enjoy, and apply more. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the bible and it really is just one long meditation on the preciousness of God's Word.

And all throughout it we see this prayer and seeking: urging God to *teach me* (v.12, 26, 33, 64, 66, 124), *to help me* (v.27, 34, 35, 73, 125, 169), and for transformation, to put God's Word into practice with new and changed perspective: *turn my heart to your decrees and not to dishonest profit. Turn my eyes from looking at what is worthless; give me life in your ways* (vv.36-37) .

Our bible reading should be marked by a humble dependence that says we can do and know nothing without God's Spirit, but also a resolved confidence that says God has given us his Spirit.

Humble yet resolved. Dependent yet confident. Does that describe your approach to God's Word whether reading it by yourself, as you come to church on Sundays or your growth group mid-week?

Do you pray for wisdom and understanding, for perspective and insight? Do you long to process all of your life through the lenses of the Gospel – whether singleness or marriage, success or failure, wealth or poverty, having kids or longing for them, popularity or rejection?

Do you pray for and seek God's wisdom? Or do you process it with worldly wisdom, driven by comparison of what others have, or rights of what you think you deserve, or comfort of the life that's easy? Or do you long to navigate all of life, the highs and lows, with the mind of Christ?

What can, what should motivate us more, to pray and to seek, than knowing God has taken the initiative to reveal himself to us by His Spirit and will continue to work in us and through us?

Pray and seek – for yourself and for others. If people can only know Jesus by the work of the Spirit, prayer must be our starting point in evangelism. Prayer for God to open blind eyes, to raise the spiritually dead, to give life as he grants faith and repentance.

Pray for God to save people, it's why our monthly prayer meetings are so helpful as we join as a church and pray for God to do the work that only God can do. Pray for your friends and family, for colleagues, and keep praying.

But also seek. Seek opportunities to speak of Jesus and take them. Speak knowing that God does pour out his Spirit, he does give life, he's done it for you and countless others. When Paul arrived in Corinth beaten and discouraged by opposition, God told him to not be afraid but to speak, because God has *many people in this city* (Acts 18:9-10). Many he would save through the Gospel.

God continues to bring people to himself through the preaching of the Gospel, through weak and fearful vessels like you and I. It may you look foolish, it will often be costly and unappreciated, but we have the mind of Christ – we know that God works by his Spirit, through his word, for our good and our growth and to save the lost – so let's pray and seek God's Wisdom, and speak it all. Let's pray.