



If you were here last Sunday, you heard me talk about the apostle Paul in rather unflattering terms. I was commenting on the fact that Paul says of himself when he visited Corinth, *“I determined to know nothing among you but Christ and him crucified. I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling”* (1 Cor. 2:2–3). From this it doesn’t appear that Paul was very impressive. His message was pretty simple and his manner was like a deer in the headlights. I went as far as to say that if Paul had come to CPC as a guest preacher we wouldn’t be very impressed. We might be very disappointed.

But I might have misled you. On the one hand, that could be true. But on the other hand we know that Paul was extremely well educated. He wrote a good percentage of the New Testament and most of what he wrote was very well thought out and masterfully written. We also know that his preaching and teaching had a magnificent impact; an impact not just felt on individual lives but on the entire Roman Empire.

So please don’t misunderstand me. It’s true there were those in Corinth who would judge Paul according to their own standards of wisdom and eloquence and find him lacking. But that doesn’t mean Paul wasn’t a brilliant mind and an effective communicator. It doesn’t mean that Paul rejected wisdom altogether. Look what he says in 2:6, *“Yet we do speak wisdom ...”* Paul has been confronting the Corinthian church about embracing human wisdom. In that culture, wisdom was measured by your ability to wax eloquently about almost any subject. The wise men of Corinth combined philosophy with skilled oratory. These guys were so persuasive they could make you believe or doubt almost anything. And people in the church were fighting over which one of their leaders had the most wisdom and the church was divided.

We’ve seen how Paul says he rejects all of that. But here Paul says, “Don’t think for a second that because I’m denouncing your worldly wisdom I’m saying that there is no wisdom at all. No! We speak wisdom! My gospel, cross and all, is true wisdom. You want to talk about wisdom, I’ll talk about wisdom.” Later on, at the very end of the passage, he’ll say something rather startling. In v.16 he says *“But we have the mind of Christ.”* That’s quite a claim. The mind of Christ is the finest and wisest mind that ever lived. Who can fathom the depths of that mind? How can Paul say that?

What if I told you we can all say that? We can all possess a mind like that? What if I told you this was God’s desire for each of us? And what if I told you this was one of the keys to living the life God wants us to live?

Do you know how we sometimes say, “It’s all in your head. Whatever problem you have, it’s all in your head”? That’s actually true. I don’t mean you’re making it up or faking it. What I mean is that your mind, your thoughts, control who you are; they define you. What’s going on in your head governs what you do.” In Col. 1:21 Paul writes, *“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”* What alienated us from God was evil behavior, our choosing things that aren’t in line with the heart of God. Paul says this enmity—this alienation—has a theater. It’s being conducted within a certain terrain: your mind. Rebellion against God is above all a head game. There are thoughts and attitudes that our mind generates that keep us alienated from God. That’s why Jesus tells us to not just love God with all our heart and soul, but also with our mind (Mt 22:37).

In this passage, Paul is going to tell us several things about true wisdom that will help us develop the mind of Christ.

### **God’s wisdom is for the mature**

First of all, Paul tells us who this wisdom is for. He says, *“Yet we do speak God’s wisdom among the mature...”* This wisdom is only for the mature. Who is that? Is this talking about a special class of super-spiritual Christians? It’s true there are mature believers and immature believers. It’s also true that many within the Corinthian church were acting in very immature ways. Paul talks about that later in chapter 3 where he says they’re acting like babies. But the point is, they shouldn’t be! They should be mature. “The mature” are simply those who embrace the crucified Christ as Savior. That’s the wisdom he’s talking about. Back in chapter 1 he said, *“We preach Christ crucified”* and he calls this *“the wisdom of God”* (verses 23, 25). The Corinthians had embraced that truth, but now they’re looking for something else. It’s kind of like if you have a 13-year-old boy and all he wants to eat is baby food. He ought to be eating solid food, after all, he’s 13 and that’s what 13-year-olds eat. Paul is saying, “You’re mature enough for this wisdom and you ought to be eating it. Why would you want to go back to baby food?” So this wisdom is for all of who embrace Christ. If you’re a follower of Christ, this wisdom, this solid food, is for you.

## **God's wisdom is not of this age or for the rulers of this age**

The second thing he says relates to who this wisdom is **not** for. He says in v. 6 that this wisdom is *"not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away..."* So these of course are unbelievers. Twice he speaks of "this age" and by that he means the present world order in contrast to the age to come. The present world order is characterized by human rebellion, sin, despair and death. That world is passing away. But the age to come is when God will rule over all, bringing an end to all the forces that oppose him. This wisdom doesn't come from this world order and it won't be embraced by this world order.

Notice he speaks of "the rulers" of this world order as well. Later in v. 8 he says *"none of the rulers of this age has understood"* this wisdom. If they had, *"they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory."* Who are these rulers? He's thinking of both earthly rulers, like Tiberius Caesar, Herod, Pilate and Caiaphas, but he's also thinking about demonic rulers. In John 16:11 Jesus calls the devil *"the ruler of this world."* The Bible tells us demonic powers have a grip on the power structures of our world. In Eph. 6:12 Paul says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness..."*

This means if we're going to possess this wisdom from God, if we're going to have the mind of Christ, we're going to have to be very discerning. We're going to have to reject much of the thinking that prevails in the world today. We can never expect the wisdom that comes from God to be in sync with the wisdom of this world. It's something altogether different. That's why you can be "winning" according to the world's standards but losing according to the standards of the world to come. It's like we're all very excited about the Giants. The whole Bay Area is into it. Even A's fans are into it. Let's be honest, for some people, this is like life and death. This is the most important thing in the world. They'll be genuinely depressed if the Giants don't win this thing. But as believers we know this means nothing in the age to come. It's all passing away.

## **God's wisdom is a mystery**

The third thing he says is that God's wisdom is a mystery. It's not of this world and it won't be understood by the rulers of this world but in v. 7 he says, *"we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory..."* We all love mysteries. A mystery is something hidden or hard to figure out. But Paul uses this word in a bit of a different sense. To Paul, God's mysteries are things hidden in previous times but now made known through the gospel. For example, the Jews didn't understand that Messiah would need to be crucified. That's not something fully grasped from the Old Testament, a mystery, but now we know; now the mystery has

been made known. Through the apparent defeat of the cross, salvation was won.

In the old television detective series, *Columbo*, we were always told at the start of each show who had done the crime. Then the fun began as a bumbling Columbo set about finding the criminal, unearthing information we already had. Watching Columbo was different from the experience of watching other mystery shows. If truth has already been made available to you, that affects your life experience and the choices you make. As Christians, we've been told ahead of time about mysteries and that impacts the way we live our lives.

And here's the mindblower. He says this God "predestined" all of this "before the ages to our glory." This wasn't an afterthought. This was God's plan from eternity. The end product of this plan is "to our glory." From the very beginning of time, God planned to unveil this mystery to us and through that to glorify us. We talk about God's glory. We say "to God be the glory." But did you know it's always been God's plan to share his glory with his people? That's why Paul quotes Isaiah in v. 9, *"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."* That's how this mystery ends, in glory for you and me and all those who trust in Christ.

## **God's wisdom is revealed only by God's Spirit**

But how do we come to know this wisdom? How does God reveal it to us? God's mysterious wisdom can't be grasped by us unless God chooses to reveal it. But, even if God reveals it, we don't have the tools to grasp it. No matter how clear the picture is on the screen, a blind man still can't see it. He needs eyes that see, and so do we. So Paul tells us how it is that God has given us those eyes in verses 10–13.

**For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.**

It's very clear that the way we understand God's wisdom is the Holy Spirit of God. Over and over, Paul says it's only through him that this wisdom can be understood. Look what Paul says about the Spirit of God. He says only the Spirit of God can fathom the depths of God. What a great statement this is of God's greatness. God is pictured here as an unfathomable deep. His thoughts and his ways are likened to the vast and dark regions beneath the surface of the ocean, the parts that are inaccessible to man. Man

can't even begin to take in all of God. Only God's Spirit can. To illustrate that Paul reminds us that only a person's own spirit can really know what that person is thinking. We experience that every day. You never know what's in another person's heart and mind. We think we do sometimes, but we can never be sure. In the same way, only God's own Spirit can know God's thoughts.

But the wonderful and stunning thing is, we've received God's Spirit into our lives. When you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ something happens to you; something changes within you. God's Spirit, who has been drawing you near in the first place, now comes to reside in you. This is what the Bible calls "regeneration" or "rebirth." And so this Spirit who fathoms the depths of God actually comes to reside in us, and because of that we can know the things freely given to us by God. Do you know what the Spirit does in your life? He helps you fathom the depths of God and a big part of that is what Paul says here: he helps you understand "the things freely given by God." Do you see what God's wisdom is all about, the wisdom that only the mature can be taught? It's about all that we've been given in Christ. It's like God's Spirit opens up a treasure chest. He comes into your life and he opens it and allows you to see everything inside that now belongs to you in Christ.

### **God's wisdom is not accepted by the natural man**

**But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ (verses 14–16).**

In contrast to that, Paul says a fifth thing: God's wisdom is not accepted by the natural man. A person without God's Spirit can't accept or understand God's wisdom. As a matter of fact, it's foolishness to him! Remember how in chapter one he talked about "the foolishness of the message preached" and how the "foolishness of God is wiser than men"? Now we see why the message of the cross is foolishness to the world—they don't have the capacity to understand it.

Notice he uses this word "appraise" three times to emphasize his point. The word means to judge or form an opinion. It was used to speak of judicial investigation prior to a hearing. Those without the Spirit can't judge or form an opinion about spiritual things or even spiritual people like the person with the Spirit can. This challenges the way we think about those who don't know Christ. We can't expect them to understand us or things we preach. Apart from the Spirit of God working in their lives, both our message and our lifestyle will be foolishness to them. Every once in a while I hear someone say of someone else, "Well, he's not a Christian but he's a very 'spiritual' person." But what

Paul says here is that none of us is really "spiritual" in and of ourselves. None of us is endowed with natural spiritual potential. Apart from the Spirit, we're all ignorant about God. This is what T.S. Elliot meant in a famous poem where he wrote:

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death, no nearer to God.  
Where is the life we have lost in the living?

In contrast to that, the spiritual person, the person with the Spirit of God dwelling in him, "*appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.*" What does that mean? Does it mean we go around judging people like a bunch of know-it-alls? Does it mean we don't allow anyone to judge us because we're so much better than they are? A lot of Christians come off that way, but that's not what it means. It means when God's Spirit enters into our life he gives us the ability to make right judgments about things. We don't do that in a vacuum, of course. We do that in conjunction with the Word of God and the community of faith around us. He gives us the ability to discern truth from error. But the person who doesn't have God's Spirit doesn't have that same ability so that person will judge our thinking and actions to be foolishness. They're not able to rightly appraise us or anything else that has to do with God. He's referring to those same people when he says "Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct him?" How can they appraise us when they don't have the mind of the Lord?"

I remember as a 20 year old taking a philosophy course in college. My professor was an atheist who loved to carve up Christianity as irrational. He had an unspoken policy that any Christian who was outspoken about his faith would get a "C." That was his way of passing off Christianity as simply average. That was the only "C" I got in college and I was proud of it. Because in God's mind, in his classroom, that professor's "C" meant an "A". That's what Paul means when he says the spiritual person is appraised by no one.

Finally he says, "*But we have the mind of Christ.*" What a great statement. This sums up everything he's said. This is why the world can't appraise us but we can "appraise all things." We have the mind of Christ. Now understand this doesn't mean we've arrived and we know it all. There is a process involved in appropriating the mind of Christ. Look at it this way: When the Spirit moves into the house that is our soul, the Spirit sees that it's already furnished. We've been to every swap meet, bargain basement and rummage sale this side of hell, and we've got the thing cluttered to the rafters with opinions and attitudes and biases and prejudices and ways of thinking. We've got a whole lifetime of thinking as a "natural man" in the flesh. Any situation we encounter—a relationship, a tragedy that befalls us, the loss of a job, getting married, whatever—we have a natural, fleshly

way of thinking about it. We have a default approach to everything in life. So when the Spirit comes to reside there this is the furniture he has to deal with. He helps us start moving things out to dump. But the surprising thing is that when the Spirit shows up, he's very gentlemanly. The Spirit isn't a bully. On occasion he'll slap you upside the head, but the Spirit mostly nudges you, taps you on the shoulder, whispers to you. The flesh continues to have a strong pull in our lives, but the Spirit is always inviting us over to Jesus' way of thinking. So it takes time to develop the mind of Christ. This is really a lifelong process.

I want to challenge you to develop the mind of Christ. If you're one who has trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you have the Spirit of God in your life; you know and embrace the wisdom of God; you have the capacity to appraise all things, but it's a way of thinking that's totally upside down from the world's way of thinking; it's a way of thinking that's completely different than the way you think in the flesh. Do you know how we talk about being good stewards of our money? Well, consider how you can become a good steward of this mind of Christ you've been given.

Start by getting rid of some the old furniture. The Bible call this "repentance." Repentance means to change your mind. Stop thinking in ways that you know are out of line with the God's wisdom. Stop it. You know what I'm talking about. You know what God wants for you, and you know the things you're thinking and doing that aren't right but you keep doing them. The bitterness and resentment, the lust, the gossip, the pride. The Spirit himself shows you those things. It's not an easy process. In 2 Cor. 10 Paul says we don't fight with the weapons of this world to demolish strongholds. The word "stronghold" is a military word for a fortress. He uses this image to speak of the entrenched ways of thinking, acting, and reacting that are in opposition to God's ways. We build these strongholds for defense purposes. As we engage in arguments to rationalize our behavior, as we lift up pretensions to pat ourselves on the back, as we entertain thoughts that continue to feed us bad information, we keep building and strengthening these strongholds. But

we have to tear them down. The word he uses speaks of a siege of sorts. He says we're to "take every thought captive and lead it obedient to Jesus." In other words, the thoughts that feed the wrong way of living—angry thoughts, resentful thoughts, lustful thoughts—you have the power to take them captive and make them obedient to Christ.

But then we have to start to replace that old stuff with new furniture. In Eph. 4, Paul says we're to be "*renewed in the spirit of our minds.*" In Rom. 12 he says to be "*transformed by the renewing of your minds.*" We become new creatures by renewing our minds. And the way you renew your mind is through Scripture; not just filling your head with more information about the Bible, but letting the truths of Scripture soak into your life. The person who is soaked in the Word of God is constantly letting the Word of God challenge old thinking and replace it with the new.

I'd like to end with a quote by Ray Stedman: "I submit to you there never was a more radical proposal to change the world than that brief statement -- to act according to the mind of Christ. Here is the true way to radically affect the world of our day. That is what God sends us out to do. I freely admit to you that there are very few of us who in any degree manifest this consistently. We are all in the process of learning, and nobody can hold himself up and say that he always operates this way. But to the degree that we are learning to fashion our lives according to the revelation of the secret and hidden wisdom of God -- these mysteries of God which are revealed in the Scriptures about ourselves, and humanity, and life -- to that degree we are letting loose in this world the mind of Christ. What a radical, powerful effect it will have upon society! This is the privilege of the spiritual man, who is able to operate in the midst of the confusion of life today in such a way as to call men back to reality, away from the confusion and the illusion and the delusions and the fantasies by which the world lives, to the realities of life as it is in Christ. What a privilege!"

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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