THE SPIRIT OF GOD

1 Corinthians 2:6–16

Key Verse: 2:10

“…these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”

Do you want to be wise? Most people do. Some think wisdom comes from natural born intelligence, a high IQ. Some think wisdom comes from having a strong and well-rounded education, or the best and most thorough information. Still others think wisdom comes with age, with having the most extensive life experiences. But why do we human beings want wisdom? We think wisdom will protect us from making foolish choices. Honestly, many seek wisdom in order to feel superior to others. We see this happening in the Corinthian church. There were divisions and quarrels because some thought they were wiser than others. So Paul tells them of God’s wisdom in the message of the cross. It’s the opposite of “the spirit of the world,” which most people follow. Paul calls God’s wisdom “a mystery that has been hidden” and “the deep things of God,” which most people never understand. He says God’s wisdom is revealed only by his Spirit. If we’re going to follow Jesus in real life and live together in community, we need God’s wisdom. What do we gain through God’s wisdom? How can we have it? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

Paul said earlier that “Greeks look for wisdom” (1:22). The ancient Greeks produced the most profound philosophers like Socrates and Plato. The Greeks’ cultural pursuit of wisdom gave them a lasting legacy that influenced the whole world. But Paul says that compared to God and the wisdom he’s revealed, the Greeks’ wisdom was “foolishness” (1:20). Why? Because the world’s wisdom doesn’t help anyone get to know God (1:21a). Paul even said that God destroys and frustrates human wisdom and intelligence (1:19). God chose to reveal his great and vastly superior wisdom in the message of the cross, Christ crucified (1:18,23,24). Christ himself becomes our “wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1:30). When we’re united with Christ, we’re right with God, we’re pure, and all our sins are paid for (2Co5:21; 1Th4:3–7; Mk10:45). In fact, in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col2:2,3). Spiritual wisdom comes not from knowing things but from knowing Christ himself. So in ministering to people Paul resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (2:2). In this way he relied not on his own wise and persuasive words but on the Spirit’s power, so that through the work of the Holy Spirit people might come to have genuine, personal faith (2:4,5).

Up to this point it might seem that Paul was anti-wisdom. But that’s not true. Read 2:6. Here Paul contrasts the message of wisdom he speaks with the wisdom of this age and of its rulers. How are these two kinds of wisdom different? First of all, Paul is speaking about God’s wisdom (7a). Next, he says in verse 6 that this wisdom is only for “the mature.” Who are they? They are those who’ve repented of their sins, believed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. And they’ve made a commitment to follow Jesus as his disciples. Though they start off spiritually immature, as they keep exercising their faith and learning more and more of Jesus, they become mature. They learn to live by the Spirit (3:1). Through living by the Spirit they attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph4:13). Only these people can grasp and appreciate God’s wisdom. Paul didn’t try to explain God’s wisdom to people not ready for it (3:2). But he poured himself into ministering to spiritually mature people who could be strengthened and encouraged by God’s wisdom.

What else does Paul say about God’s wisdom? Read verse 7. Before Jesus came to this world, died and rose again, and poured out God’s Spirit, God’s wisdom was a “mystery that has been hidden” for long ages past (Ro16:25). It was hidden, but God destined this wisdom to be “for our glory before time began.” Our Creator God had a plan before the creation of the world to give us this wisdom (Eph1:4). We need to stop and appreciate what a glorious privilege we have when we’re enlightened by God’s wisdom.

Then as now, there are so many people who have no idea about God’s wisdom. But what difference does it make? Read verse 8. Without understanding God’s wisdom, even the most powerful and wise people make the worst mistake. The greatest mistake made in human history was to crucify the Lord of glory, Jesus. It was an act of sheer spiritual blindness, because people should have been able to recognize him (Jn1:10,11). But people are still making this mistake. How so? It’s whenever we choose to sin. There’s a sense in which every sin we commit is like crucifying the Lord of glory all over again (Heb6:6). When we try to be the owners of our own lives and leave God out, we’re just as spiritually blind as the rulers who crucified Jesus; we’re rejecting the most precious cornerstone of salvation (Mk12:10,11; 1Pe2:6,7).

In this world many people consider themselves wise. Through their wisdom they’ve achieved success and obtained many things. They think they have an appreciation of the finer things in life. But those who have God’s wisdom have a far greater blessing. How so? Read verses 9,10a. God’s wisdom is beyond human perception and comprehension. This is why so many people don’t get it. We can’t grasp it with our human faculties or reasoning, but it’s nonetheless real. It’s something wonderful God has prepared for us. When we think of the word “prepared,” we initially think Paul may be talking about heaven. It’s true that heaven is going to be so wonderful we have no idea how great it’s going to be. But it’s not just about life after death, or about a place. God has prepared a full and deep personal relationship with him through our Lord Jesus Christ. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph3:12). God also has prepared deep and rich relationships with others, who may be humanly very different from us, but who are living in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (1:9; Eph3:6). Elsewhere, Paul calls what God has prepared for us the “long and high and wide and deep…love of Christ,” “the love that surpasses knowledge” (Eph3:18,19). We get to enjoy this love both now and for all eternity.

How can we really experience it? Read verse 10. God reveals the most mind-blowing blessings for us only by his Spirit. God helps us get a taste of his kingdom right now, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Ro14:17). Without God’s Spirit we remain stuck in the things of this world. We feel tired, depressed, even lost. But with God’s Spirit revealing his wisdom to us, our souls are renewed and deeply satisfied. We can’t depend on our brain power or our feelings to help us. We really need God’s Spirit. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk11:13) All we have to do is ask! Why don’t we really ask for the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s wisdom to us?

Paul goes on to explain how the Spirit helps us go deep into God’s wisdom. Read verse 10b again. What does this mean? It means that the Spirit gives us discernment about everything. He helps us know Jesus better and deeper (Eph1:17). He helps us understand the deep meanings of the Bible, which can be really hard to figure out. He helps us understand people’s hearts, which can also be really hard. He helps us become more deeply aware of sin (Jn16:8,9). He renews our minds to discern God’s inscrutable will (Ro12:2). He helps us understand the future. According to verse 13, he helps us understand spiritual realities. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples the night before his arrest, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (Jn16:13a). Here Paul says that the Spirit searches “the deep things of God.” He adds in verse 11 “the thoughts of God.” What could he have in mind? It’s God’s plan for world salvation. God’s plan was in the Bible all along, long before Jesus came. But the Jews in their narrow-mindedness failed to see it. God wanted to save all peoples of all nations through the gospel. God still wants to reveal this mystery. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:6, “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” Through the Spirit we become more aware of God’s greater plan to bring people from every tribe and nation and people and language to his kingdom (Rev7:9). Without his Spirit, we can only become engrossed in ourselves and ignore God’s greater vision.

Read verse 12. What is “the spirit of the world”? It’s the world’s way of thinking, which is basically godless (1Jn4:5). It’s a spirit that gets us to focus on the desires of the flesh (Ro8:5). It’s a spirit that makes us blind to see the light of Jesus (2Co4:4). It’s a spirit that makes us follow the devil and become disobedient to God (Eph2:2). Though we’re Christians who’ve received the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the world still tries to influence us and lead us astray. So we need to keep on receiving the Spirit of God, who can remind us of what God has freely given us. God has freely given us his grace as a gift. God has freely given us eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ro6:23b). When we really understand this, our mindset becomes spiritual, not worldly.

Paul also goes on to describe his ministry. Read verse 13. It was not an intellectual ministry but a spiritual ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that so often we worry about what to say. But we shouldn’t worry; we should depend on the Spirit of God to teach us what to say. The Spirit of God reminds us at just the right time of everything Jesus taught (Jn14:26), if only we rely on him.

Read verse 14. Paul is sharing why it is futile to try to explain God’s wisdom to people who have yet to receive God’s Spirit. They won’t get it, because the only way to understand God’s wisdom is through God’s Spirit. Read verse 15. When we have the Spirit of God, we can discern all kinds of things. And because we have the Spirit of God, we don’t have to listen to merely human judgments about us.

Where is Paul going with this? Read verse 16. No one can teach God, no matter how much they think they know. But by the Spirit of God, we have the mind of Christ. What a great blessing it is! When we have the mind of Christ, we can agree with other believers and be perfectly united in mind and thought (1:10). When we have the mind of Christ, we share God’s wisdom and have his heart to save the whole world.

Read verse 10 again. May God help us ask for the Spirit of God to reveal his wisdom to us. Through the Spirit of God may God protect us from the spirit of the world and give us a spiritual mindset. Through the Spirit of God may God equip each of us to be a good shepherd and Bible teacher for those who are lost.