

Parkwood Presbyterian Church – August 11, 2024

To Exalt Christ

To Equip, Encourage, Exhort and Edify God's Elect

The Church's Counselor – 1 Corinthians 2:1-10

This morning we come to the fourth in our series of sermons from 1 Corinthians. In the third of our series, chapter 1:18-31, Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. In the wisdom of the world the cross of Christ is foolishness, but to those being saved says Paul, by faith in Christ and his death on that cross, it is the wisdom and power of God.

God was pleased said Paul, through the foolishness of what was preached by himself & others such as Apollos & Peter to save those who believed. Christ embodies the wisdom of God and in doing so says Paul, he becomes our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption, what we could not attain on our own.

Paul carries that thought of the foolishness of what was preached into chapter two as we begin to look at -

The Holy Spirit's Power – 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

In **verse 1** Paul says – *“When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”* Paul opens by saying - *“When I came to you....”* Paul's ministry was personal, face to face, often one on one, even with governors & kings. Acts 18 tells of Paul leaving Athens and going the first time to Corinth. There he preached the gospel in the synagogue until he was not welcome there anymore. He continued preaching however and saw the synagogue ruler, Crispus and his family come to faith along with many other Corinthians. That was the start of the church in Corinth when he came with personal preaching of the gospel.

Paul also said that he *“did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”* The beauty of the gospel, *“the testimony about God”*, is its ability to be described and declared simply and straightforwardly. But we also see from Paul's letters its profoundness, its depth, its intensity, its ability to challenge minds to think and to set our minds and hearts on things above.

Think of the doctrinal and theological depth of Paul's letter to the Romans for example. It demands rigorous reading and study but the reward is great. Consider the gospel of John. It goes deep into the mind of God through the life and work of Christ. All of Paul's letters and those of John have that element of challenge but also comprehensibility because by the Holy Spirit's power he guides and illumines the text for the reader.

Paul met and mixed with the people where they were just as Jesus and John the Baptist did. They were out not on a high mountain peak or in a cave or tent. They were in the synagogue and the street, in the church and the community. They were always ready to give a reason for the hope they had. 1 Peter 3:15.

In **verse 2** Paul wrote – *“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* We can be critical of people who have a one-track mind but in Paul's case we excuse him. Paul's focus since his conversion was Jesus Christ & his death on the cross. That which prior to his conversion was foolishness now consumes his every thought. Matthew Henry, 1662-1714, said of Paul – *“His business is to display the banner of the cross & invite people under it.”*

His mind was fully and faithfully employed fruitfully. So too was John Calvin's, 1509-1564, the great reformer. He wrote – *“Here we have a beautiful passage, from which we learn what it is that faithful ministers ought to teach, what it is that we must during our whole life be learning.”*

In **verse 3** Paul says – *“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”* This is quite an admission Paul makes. We wonder what he meant. One commentator said that prior to coming to Corinth, Paul had been beaten, put in prison in Philippi, run out of Thessalonica and Berea and scoffed at in Athens. Acts 16:22-24; 17:10, 13-14, 32.

After all that, Paul comes to Corinth. It would stand to reason that he might come *“in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”* It might also indicate that Paul did not come brashly, arrogantly or in a domineering manner, but humbly. The cross had humbled him. The risen Christ had brought him literally to his knees on the dusty road to Damascus. He was mandated by Christ to suffer for his name, the name of Christ, and suffer he did, so nothing was a surprise to him.

Verse 4 may explain verse 3. Paul says – *“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's*

power.” Here Paul is giving the credit for his preaching of the gospel to the power of the Holy Spirit, not his power which is weak and fearful and trembling.

In Acts 9 when Paul was blinded by the glory of Christ, Jesus sent Ananias to the house where Paul was staying. In 9:17 Ananias went there and *“Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”* From that moment on Paul experienced the power of the Holy Spirit which never left him. So, when he preached, taught or wrote it was by the power of the Holy Spirit there with him and in him.

Paul refers greatly to the Holy Spirit in 12 of his 13 epistles. The Holy Spirit is very much a part of his preaching, teaching and writing, plus his faith and life. We also see that Paul is a trinitarian theologian, that God is one in three persons.

In **verse 5** Paul explains why the Holy Spirit’s power is needed in the preaching of the gospel. Paul said, – *“so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power.”* The power, the ability to believe comes from God through the Spirit. Since it does, the faith that is generated, the knowledge and understanding accompanying it will therefore endure.

John Calvin writes – *“God bends the hearts of men to obedience, so that they follow him voluntarily and willingly, being taught inwardly by the influence of the Spirit, outwardly by the preaching of the word.”* The influence of the Holy Spirit is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s power and therefore the power behind, under and over the preaching of the word and the word itself. That leads us to -

The Holy Spirit’s Purpose – 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

In **verse 6** Paul wrote – *“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”* In verse 6 Paul has gone from ‘I’ to ‘we’. This collective ‘we’ would include Apollos and Peter, which he had already mentioned. They together *“speak a message of wisdom among the mature.”* Paul is declaring the consistent, unchanging, undeviating message of the gospel among the preachers.

Notice also that Paul says it is a message of wisdom *“among the mature.”* The mature are those who hear the gospel message and embrace it. The term, ‘mature’, means perfect, they are complete in their understanding & knowledge of the gospel.

That gospel Paul says is the wisdom they preach and not *“the wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”* In **verse 7** Paul speaks of the wisdom that triumphs over the wisdom of any age or ruler. Paul states – *“No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.”*

That triumphant wisdom is God’s secret wisdom that has been hidden for how long? – *“before time began.”* That is how old the story of our salvation in Christ is. Listen to the words of 1 Peter 1:20 – *“He, [Christ] was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”*

Listen to Paul in Ephesians 1:4-5 – *“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”* Christ was chosen, we were chosen in him to be the benefactors of God’s message of wisdom *“that God destined for our glory before time began.”* We also see that consistency of the message.

Matthew Henry says – *“The wisdom of God discovered in the gospel, the divine wisdom taught by the gospel, prepares for our everlasting glory and happiness in the world to come. The counsels of God concerning our redemption are dated from eternity, and designed for the glory and happiness of the saints.”* Paul wants the church at Corinth and the church today to understand the value of knowing, understanding & accepting the gospel because it has eternal consequences for our future glory.

In **verse 8** Paul says – *“None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* IOW if they had understood the seriousness of their sin and what was God’s plan to deal with it in the death of Christ, they may have changed their minds. Think of what might happen if the rulers of our age understood the gospel & embraced it. What might the world look like?

In **verse 9** Paul keeps with his theme of wisdom which is secret and hidden. He wrote – *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”* The secret of one’s salvation is their love for God. Their love for God does not come naturally but supernaturally through the power of God exercised through the power of the Holy Spirit. It brings God’s elect, those destined for glory before time began, to faith in the gospel, the message of wisdom among the mature. It is a glory that is past our ability to comprehend by

sight, hearing and thought of what it will be like. That is what *“God has prepared for those who love him.”*

We are used to sight and sound and thought and this glory goes beyond any of our natural abilities to imagine. Matthew Henry says – *“We cannot discover them but by the light of revelation”* which brings us to the purpose of the Holy Spirit. In **verse 10** Paul says – *“but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”* The Holy Spirit has two purposes says Paul – to reveal and to search.

To reveal and to search is proof of both the power and purpose of the Holy Spirit. Jesus introduced us to that purpose and power in John 16:7-9. He said – *“Unless I go away, the Counselor [i.e., the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...when he the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”*

The power and the purpose of the Holy Spirit are intertwined. His power enables him to fulfill his purpose which is to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin. He is therefore not only our counselor, one who guides us into all truth, but also our conscience. The guilt we experience when we sin convinces and convicts us of our need for God’s righteousness in Christ and the reality of a final day of judgment.

The power and purpose of the Holy Spirit enables him to reveal to us God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and now revealed in Jesus Christ. The gospel, God’s plan to redeem mankind was hidden in eternity but revealed in finitude. John Calvin speaks of this revelation as a *“special illumination of the Holy Spirit.”* The Holy Spirit is able as Paul says to *“search all things, even the deep things of God.”*

The word ‘search’ as Paul uses it here, means in the Greek of his day – *“to hear intelligently.”* IOW the Holy Spirit is always open to the *“deep things of God.”* He is able hear the thoughts of God and then to reveal them to those such as Paul, Apollos and Peter and to us as we read and study God’s word. God’s secret wisdom is made known even to us. How else would we know the gospel?

John Calvin confirms that when he says – *“By the ‘deep things’ you must understand is the entire doctrine of salvation, which would have been to no purpose set before us in the Scriptures, were it not that God elevates our minds to it by his*

Spirit.” That speaks to both the power and the purpose of the Holy Spirit as the church’s counselor and ours. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria