

Gospel Wisdom in a Messy World

- 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Introduction:

- Today, I want to start with asking you all a couple of questions. And I'm not expecting you to give me an answer, but they're questions that I want you to think through as we go through our passage today. Has the Gospel changed your life? If so, how has it changed your life? How has the message of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection changed your life?
- Even more, how is the Gospel changing your life?
- These are important questions to think about, and they're essentially the questions that Paul is asking to the church in Corinth through this letter of 1 Corinthians.
- And we've seen already, over the past two weeks, the focus that Paul has on helping the church look at life through the "Lens of the Gospel", encouraging them to make the Gospel their central priority above anything else.
- We saw that in the first week as Paul reminded the church of who they are in Christ, and what Christ has done for them, and last week as he reminded them that church is not all about how they want it to look, it's about the Gospel, so don't bicker over things that don't matter.
- Well the passage that we're looking at today is almost like "part 2" of what Darryl talked with us about last week.
- The passage we looked at together last week is among my favourites in all of Scripture, especially 2:1-5.
- I love that passage, like look at 2:1-5 as Paul says that he decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. It feels like the perfect "mic drop" moment, like he's made his point, he's nailed it home, now he can move on to the next thing. But Paul keeps going, and the passage that we're looking at today begins with a very important word "yet".
- It shows that Paul wants to clarify a few things for the church about what he's just said, and essentially, this passage begins with a big disclaimer from Paul.
- And I love this, because it shows that Paul really understands the people that he's writing to. We read these passages, this book of 1 Corinthians, and think of the abstract idea of a messy church in Corinth, but Paul isn't just writing to a messy church in Corinth. He's writing to a group of People that he lived with for a year and a half, teaching them and helping them to grow. He knows them.

- He knows that with what he's already said, they need some further clarification, otherwise there's the risk of new misunderstandings as he's trying to correct the old ones.
- In this passage Paul shows more of the implications of the Gospel lens, and how the Gospel should be impacting the life of the church, particularly in the area of wisdom.
- Essentially, the big idea is this:
- *Viewing our life through the lens of the Gospel should cause us to live our lives through the wisdom of the Gospel.*
- That's his big idea, and the main point that he wants to nail home here, so as we go through this passage, we're going to unpack that idea a bit more as Paul explains a lot more of the "what" and the "how" of that statement. What it means, and how we do it.

Gospel Wisdom leads to growth in Christian Maturity

- So at the beginning we want to look at the "what", as Paul gives us a greater insight into the wisdom of the Gospel, and how it is different from the wisdom of the world. He explains a bit more about what that actually means to have "Gospel Wisdom", and it's here that we get to his "disclaimer" to the church as he begins with the word "yet", and goes on to say:

"Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away" - 1 Cor. 2:6 (ESV)

- In the passages we've looked at previously, Paul has been very intentional to downplay his own wisdom, and really the church's understanding of wisdom in general, which was heavily influenced by the culture around them.
- He has said that his message was not in "*plausible words of wisdom*", and that "*in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe*" just to give a few examples.
- And Paul's goal in this, as Darryl pointed out for us last week, is to try to minimize himself, as well as the other teachers that people were kind of rallying around, to remind the church that the main thing they should be concerned about is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not their own wisdom or preferences.
- But he doesn't want the church to misunderstand, and begin to think that maybe the Gospel itself isn't all that special, or to take Paul's downplaying his own wisdom as downplaying the wisdom of the cross, so he makes that clear here that "*among the mature we do impart wisdom*".

- And he makes clear, once again, that the wisdom of the Gospel, is not the same as the wisdom of the world, which he was speaking against previously. He says, “it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away”
- Instead he continues to explain in V. 7:

“But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” - 1 Cor. 2:7 (ESV)

- Now as we look at just these first two verses, there’s a few important things to look at in order to understand what Paul is trying to get at here. First, is this idea of the “*secret or hidden wisdom of God*” that he refers to in V. 7.
- When Paul talks about this “*hidden wisdom*”, really he’s emphasizing even more the separation between worldly wisdom and Gospel wisdom, that the wisdom of the Gospel is “foolishness”, and makes no sense to those who have not trusted in Christ, as we looked at last week.
- Anthony Thistleton writes:
 - *“There is one kind of so-called wisdom that is pretentious, self-affirming, and seeks to operate by means of human achievements; and there is a God-given, received, revealed wisdom that nurtures and directs the life of the people of God”*
- So the wisdom of God and the Gospel is so different from the world, which was just interested in wisdom for wisdom’s sake, trying to be the “wisest”, and be celebrated by the people around you for your wisdom. But God’s wisdom isn’t about just wisdom for wisdom’s sake, or this kind of self-promotion, gaining praise from others. Instead, it’s such a beautiful gift that is given to us through Christ, to be able to know him, yet to those who do not know Christ, this God given wisdom seems like utter foolishness. That’s what he means when he says that this wisdom of God is “secret” and “hidden”. This is a type of wisdom that only makes sense to those who have trusted in Christ.
- Paul even says in V. 8 that if the world knew this, or understood the wisdom that Christ preached, they would not have crucified him.
- And the next thing that we want to understand is what Paul means when he says that they impart this message of wisdom among the “*mature*”.
- It’s important to understand that when Paul talks about this message of wisdom for the “mature” he isn’t advocating for different classes of Christianity here.
- Again, Thistleton explains it this way:

- *“As for Christian maturity, this denotes not some supposed second or advanced stage that has left the cross behind, but growth in Christ-likeness”*
- The wisdom and maturity that Paul is talking about here has far more to do with how the Gospel actually impacts and changes your life.
- Gospel wisdom should lead to Christian maturity
- Another commentary that I looked at put it this way: *“God’s wisdom is as much about how to live as what to believe”*, which again, was very different from the culture of that age which saw the purpose of wisdom as merely knowing the right things and having certain levels of understanding, to receive the praise and admiration of people around you. Gospel wisdom isn’t about just knowing as much as you can about the Gospel, it’s about actually allowing the Gospel to impact and change the way that you live. Growing in this Christian maturity and Christ likeness
- If you look at Jesus, and his interactions with different people, recorded for us in the Gospels, you notice that he would always emphasize this idea of obedience and a changed life. Whenever he would talk with people there was always some kind of “call to action” that was involved, as he would call people to a life of obedience to God.
- Just to give a few examples of this, look at Jesus’ interaction with a woman caught in adultery. After he’s sent away those who want to stone her he says these words:

“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” - John 8:11b (ESV)

- And in John 14:15 Jesus tells his disciples:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” - John 14:15 (ESV)

- Even in the great commission Jesus tells us to make disciples, then:

“Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you” - Matt. 28:20a (ESV)

- There is an implication here that to follow Christ, to live in the wisdom of the Gospel that Paul talks about, means a life that is changed to be more like Christ. It’s not just about knowing the facts, it’s about becoming more like him, and living a wise life of obedience according to the Gospel.
- Not only is the Gospel a hugely counter cultural message, like we saw last week, that God would die for his creation, but a proper understanding of the Gospel leads to hugely counter cultural living

- And in V. 7 Paul points out that this wisdom was decreed by God “*before the ages, for our glory*”. And in V. 8, Jesus is called the “*Lord of glory*”.
- Some people will look at a life of following Christ and think it’s just a restrictive life full of lots of “don’ts” that keeps you from experiencing the truly good things in life, when in reality, a life of following Christ means a life of growing in Gospel wisdom, which was decreed before the ages for our glory, becoming more like him so that one day we will spend eternity in glory with our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paul then says in V. 9

“But, as it is written,

‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,

nor the heart of man imagined,

what God has prepared for those who love him ’” - 1 Cor. 2:9 (ESV)

- Living with this kind of counter-cultural wisdom may not always be easy, but it is worth it, for the sake of spending eternity with Christ, “*what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*” It’s worth it.
- So I want to encourage you to seek out this wisdom, the wisdom of the Gospel. And not just for the sake of knowing more, but to actually let it change your life and transform you to make you more like Christ.
- And where better to find and learn the wisdom of God than in God’s Word itself. In this book God has given us everything that we need to be able to learn the wisdom of the Gospel, and become more like Christ.

We Learn Gospel Wisdom through the work of the Holy Spirit

- And that leads right into talking about how we actually learn this wisdom? How do we look into Scripture to learn how to live with Gospel wisdom, so that we become more like Christ?
- I was in a lecture this past week in which the pastor who was teaching looked at a book that was written about the life and miracles of Jesus by a man who did not believe that anything in the Bible is true. The pastor who was commenting on it told us that this man had a great understanding of the text, and could analyze Scripture better than many other people that he knew, in terms of noticing patterns, and small details within the text, yet he didn’t believe a word of it.

- So what's the difference between us, and him? How do we look at this book and be changed by it, while so many look at it and just see a bunch of stories they don't believe ever happened? If Paul describes the wisdom of the Gospel as the "*secret or hidden*" wisdom of God, how are we able to learn and understand it?
- The simple answer that Paul gives here, is that we learn Gospel wisdom through the work of the Holy Spirit. But he doesn't say it quite as simply as that, so I want to take some time to look a bit deeper into his words here, because they show us just how amazing of a gift this is that we've been given in the Holy Spirit. Let's look at V. 10-16:

"these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." - 1 Cor. 2:10 (ESV)

- Wow. God has revealed his wisdom to us through his Spirit, who searches everything, even the depths of God. Isn't that amazing? If you've placed your trust in Christ, you have this Spirit in you, who is able to search even the depths of God. But that's not all. Let's keep reading: Verse 11

"For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." - 1 Cor. 2:11 (ESV)

- And we see in this verse the need that we have for the Spirit in order to understand the wisdom of the Gospel. Paul makes clear that no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God, so if we want to be able to understand and learn from the wisdom that is found in Scripture, we need to have the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts.
- But this again shows the beauty of the gift that we've been given in the Spirit, as we're able to know the thoughts of God through the work of his Spirit in our lives.
- So as you read Scripture, as you read God's Word to learn how to live a life of obedience to him, you have the Holy Spirit at work inside of you, helping you to understand what God is saying. So as you come to the Bible, pray that the Spirit would help you to see how you can be growing in wisdom and living a life of maturity and obedience to God.
- And let this cause you to praise God for the gift of the Spirit that he's given you, which allows you to see the wisdom which is in his Word.
- Let's read the rest of these verses now:

"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. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual."

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 'For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ." - 1 Cor. 2:12-16 (ESV)

- This goes back to the idea that Paul brought up in V. 7 about the “*secret and hidden wisdom of God*”, which is so different from the wisdom of the world. That without the Spirit, even though someone might be able to read Scripture and notice lots of little details and things about what he’s reading, ultimately, as Paul says, “*it will all be folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*”
- And we see again how well Paul knows the people he’s writing to, because just in case the church would begin to feel prideful and puffed up about this wisdom that they are able to understand as those who have trusted in Christ, Paul makes very clear that it is by the Spirit “*who is from God*”, and that we are able to “*understand the things freely given us by God*”. We’re also going to see next week Paul informing the church that they have lots still to learn.
- It’s not because we’re so smart or so wise on our own that we’re able to see the wisdom of the Gospel, and be changed by it, it is because of the gift of the Spirit that God has given to us. So we have no reason to be prideful in any way over this wisdom, because without this gift, given freely by God, we’re just as lost as anyone else.
- But because of the gift of the Spirit that God has given us, we are able to read his Word, and truly be changed and transformed by what it says.

Conclusion:

- So I want to return to the question I asked you at the beginning; has the Gospel changed your life, and how is it still changing you?
- How is the Spirit at work in your life, teaching you the wisdom that is found in God’s Word and helping you to grow in Christian maturity?
- Because the message that Paul is giving us here in this text is again, that *viewing our life through the lens of the Gospel, should cause us to live our life through the wisdom of the Gospel.*
- And if I may add this, *which is made known to us by the power of the Spirit.*
- And if you’re here and you’ve never trusted in Christ, I would invite you to do that today. To place your trust in him, receive his forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that he’s promised to those who follow him, so that you can begin to grow and be changed by him.
- *Viewing our life through the lens of the Gospel should cause us to live our life through the wisdom of the Gospel which is made known to us by the power of the Spirit.*

- So seek out the wisdom that God has given us in his Word, and pray that his Spirit would be at work in your heart, helping you to understand the wisdom that is found in Scripture, changing you and making you more like Christ as you grow in Christian maturity.