**A DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT’S POWER**

**(1 Corinthians 2:1-16)**

***“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” (vs. 4-5)***

In Chapter 1, we learned that some Corinthian believers were claiming superiority over others based on the leaders they followed. Paul vehemently opposed such thinking and reminded them that they had lost sight of what is most important: Christ crucified. For the message of the cross is foolishness in the eyes of the world; but to those who are being saved it is the power and wisdom of God (1 Co 1:18). This reveals an important truth: unless a person is willing to submit their own human wisdom before the true wisdom of God, they will remain spiritually immature. What do you think? Are we much different from the Corinthians? Do we rely too much on our own wisdom and abilities? Do we take pride in our achievements and titles? Do we think that science, technology and Google can better solve our problems than the word of God? We must acknowledge our desperate need for God’s wisdom. The good news is that God has made his wisdom available to us through the gospel and by his Holy Spirit. In today’s passage, we’ll learn from Paul about how to utilize these resources so that we can be effective gospel witnesses and have spiritual discernment for all areas of our lives.

1. **Preaching that is grounded in the Spirit, not human wisdom (vs. 1-5)**

In the last part of Chapter 1, Paul explained that in his great wisdom, God delights in choosing the lowly and despised things of this world to shame the wise and strong. This is why we should always remain humble before God. So Paul ended this part by saying, *“Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord’” (1 Co 1:31).*

Now he encourages us through his own example. Look at verse 1. ***“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”*** In Paul’s day, it was said that one couldn’t walk down a street in Corinth without meeting a philosopher. Philosophy, oratory and rhetoric (i.e. arguing persuasively) were highly popular and highly developed. So talented speakers could draw huge crowds to promote their ideas and make lots of money. Apostle Paul could have easily followed suit. He was a highly educated scholar who studied under the famous rabbi Gamaliel. Since he grew up in Tarsus, he was very familiar with Hellenistic culture. And from his letters, we know he was an exceedingly talented writer. If he wanted to, he could have delivered speeches more eloquent than any of his contemporaries.

Yet, Paul refused. Why? Paul isn’t saying that biblical scholarship and careful preparation and public speaking skills aren’t important for God’s servants. He is saying that he made a *conscious decision* to deny his own “human wisdom” while serving God’s work. If Paul put the focus on his own wisdom and speaking abilities, his ministry would have become focused on his personal success. Even worse, it would have emptied the message of the cross of its power (1 Co 1:17). But Paul testifies in verse 3, ***“I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.”*** These are not the words of a man confident in his own abilities. These are the words of man deeply aware of his limitations, completely entrusting himself to God’s hands.

How then *did* Paul preach? Look at verse 2. ***“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*** Rather than trying to dress it up nicely or sugar-coating it to make it more appealing, Paul preached God’s word as it is. The content of his preaching? ***“Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*** That is, the person and work of Jesus Christ. Isn’t this what people really need? We are surrounded daily by worldly advice, quick fixes and cheesy inspirational quotes. These things may provide temporary relief, but the gospel that Paul brought to Corinth was something entirely different, something supremely precious. It is the story about a God who loved his fallen creation. About Jesus Christ, who though in very nature God was born into this world to be “God with us”. It is about Jesus’ life and ministry, the Messiah who came to befriend sinners, the compassionate Shepherd King who healed, taught and forgave those who sought refuge in him. It is also the story about his cross. Jesus’ mission was to die in our place as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And though we sinful human beings rejected and crucified him, he carried his mission to completion. It is the story about his victorious resurrection, which gives us a real hope in God’s eternal kingdom. This is the good news that changes people’s lives forever. But it is also the story the world hates most. It is unpopular because it magnifies God and exposes humans as guilty sinners. It challenges its hearers to repent and believe and to confess Jesus as Lord. It is the message that everyone needs and yet nobody wants to hear.

Read verse 2 again. ***“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*** Paul didn’t just preach Christ crucified, he *lived* Christ crucified. By denying his own sinful pride, he became a follower of Jesus Christ rather than a follower of the philosophers of his age. His resolution to know Christ alone was the driving force of his life. So in Philippians 3:10 he confessed, *“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death…”* Embracing Jesus and his Way of the Cross is not an easy decision but it is the heart and soul of our faith.

The secret to Paul’s effectiveness as a preacher is summarized in verses 4-5. Let’s read these verses together. ***“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”*** If Paul convinced the Corinthians to become Christians based on his eloquent words and human reasoning, the foundation of their faith would be nothing more than another human idea. When things became difficult, they would fall away and move on to other ideas. But Paul’s preaching was done with ***“a demonstration of the Spirit’s power”*** so that their faith would rest on the unchanging, unshakable reality of God’s power.

So what exactly is ***“a demonstration of the Spirit’s power”***? I don’t think Paul is talking about awe-inspiring miracles here. If we read about his Corinth ministry in Acts 18, no miracles are mentioned. It only says that *“…Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah” (Ac 18:5).* Paul didn’t have a magic wand. He wasn’t a master of hypnosis. He simply taught about Christ crucified to anyone who would listen and prayed that the Holy Spirit would work in people’s hearts. Despite severe persecution, God brought Titius Justus, Crispus the synagogue ruler, Sosthenes and many other Corinthians to faith in Christ. As Paul preached the pure gospel, it was the Holy Spirit who convicted each of them as sinners and helped them to accept Jesus’ sacrifice for their sins by faith. Truly, it is the Holy Spirit who does the hard work in evangelism. What God seeks is people who will simply preach the good news as it is so that his Spirit can powerfully convict people and open their eyes to God’s redeeming love.

A book by the title “The Gospel is Enough” attests to this. A Korean man named Heemoon Gwak once worked in a private business preparing students for their college entrance exams. He was an atheist who had never read the Bible or attended church. One day, he came home to his wife and daughter weeping over the condition of people who lived in the slums of Korogocho in Nairobi, Kenya. There, people live on less than $1.00 per day, AIDS and drug abuse are common, and most residents spend their days scavenging the huge garbage piles for something to live off of. After years of fundraising, the family eventually wanted to go to Korogocho as part of a non-government organization (NGO). To do so, Mr. Gwak had to prove he was a church member. At first he only participated in church and prayer meetings out of formality, but eventually met Christ personally and his whole family came to believe. In Korogocho, Mr. Gwak’s family decided to move away from the NGO to live closer to the people by the garbage piles, a very dangerous area. Mr. Gwak began to share the gospel with the children there and eventually their parents. The problem was that he had only been a Christian for a few years and his English was limited. Yet, when he asked God for wisdom, God gave him wisdom. This wisdom was the gospel. He realized that whoever the audience may be, preaching the gospel, including man’s sin, the cross, and repentance, is God’s will. When he shared his simplistic version of the gospel, some present responded positively. Still, Mr. Gwak believed that no one would show up the following Sunday since he had no food to share with them. He was shocked, therefore, when even more people came the next week! At that point, he realized he didn’t have anything new to say. So he basically retold the same message: sin, the cross, repentance. Over the coming weeks, with the same message being preached again and again, several attendees cried tears of repentance and began to call on Jesus’ name. Within three years, 100 people attended the worship services and their lives were changed. Mr. Gwak calls it “the revival through the cross.” So whenever he went back to visit Korea, he always testified to others, “the gospel is enough!”

I believe you have had similar experiences in your own life. Think about the messages you heard or the Bible studies you participated in that were integral in bringing you to faith in Christ. Was it the speaker’s eloquence or human wisdom that made the difference that day? Or was it the Holy Spirit who was at work, making’s God’s word spring to life and bringing you face to face with the living Lord Jesus? Though I am so thankful to God’s servants for what they did for me, I see it is the Holy Spirit who I should be most thankful for. When the message of the cross was preached, it was he who melded Jesus’ story with my own and gave me new life. As we have experienced this as hearers of the gospel, I pray that we may also experience it as preachers of the gospel, whether as messengers or as Bible teachers or as witnesses to our family, friends and coworkers. Although I am still so immature in my own preaching, I can testify that there is no greater feeling in life than to experience a demonstration of the Spirit’s power in my heart as I meditate on and preach about Christ’s love. There is nothing so honorable or meaningful as being a channel through which the Holy Spirit can grant people new life. I pray that as we each grow as servants of God, we may become effective gospel witnesses who preach the message of the cross as it is and allow others to meet Christ crucified for themselves.

1. **The Spirit gives true spiritual discernment (vs. 6-16)**

Having explained what Spirit-inspired preaching looks like, Paul goes on to teach more about the spiritual discernment we can receive from our relationship with the Spirit. In verses 6-16, we can find many contrasts between those who have the Spirit and those who don’t.

Look at verses 6-7. ***“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.”*** Although Paul’s message seemed humanly unimpressive, the Corinthians were not to be mistaken. The gospel is God’s wisdom, a mystery hidden in ages past which God prepared in advance for those who love him. This mystery is that through Christ and his cross, God had in mind to reconcile sinners to himself even before the creation of the world. It is a mystery because humans could have never concocted something so incredible, nor can anyone discover it apart from God’s help. The gospel is thus the treasure “hiding in plain sight” which most will never find.

Paul says in verse 8, ***“None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”*** All people are born under the power of sin as natural rebels against God. When Christ came into this world, he revealed the mystery of God’s redemptive love, calling all people to repent and believe. But the leaders of the Pharisees, the chief priests, King Herod, Pontius Pilate and other rulers of that age rejected Christ’s kingship. They crucified the Lord of glory because their stubborn unbelief blinded them to God’s grace. This is typical of all unbelievers. Anyone who rejects Christ’s lordship in any generation is guilty of crucifying the Lord of glory and remains under God’s judgment.

But that is not the whole story. Look at verses 9-12. ***“However, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”*** Those who respond to God’s revelation with faith and love receive the greatest gift of all: The Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God’s very presence dwelling in us. And as the Spirit of God, he has access to the deep things residing in God’s mind and heart, which he delights to share with us! At least, as much as we can handle. This includes spiritual insight into the things God has freely given us and prepared for us. I’m sure you are familiar with them. That peace that washes over you when you are certain that your sins are forgiven through the cross—that’s the Holy Spirit. When the word of God provides a clear answer about what you should do—the Spirit is there. When you are empowered to make a costly decision for God’s kingdom because you have such a clear hope in your heavenly reward—it’s all the Spirit’s doing. It’s the Holy Spirit who makes us truly rich and who makes us cognizant of our riches.

Verses 14-16 summarize the difference the Spirit makes. ***“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”*** The person who lacks the Spirit is limited to seeing things from a human point of view. Because they cannot understand the truth about God, about sin or about themselves, they are unqualified to judge believers as well. But we who have the Spirit are given real, infallible, spiritual discernment from God. So as we submit ourselves to the Spirit’s guidance, God’s insight gives us the ability to make right judgments about all things, even ourselves and other people. Should this then make us proud or give us reason to judge others? Of course not! This is all the gift of God! As Paul says in verse 16b, true spiritual discernment is having the mind of Christ. We can thus know we are living with true spiritual discernment if we exude the qualities of Christ. Christlike discernment makes us slow to speak and quick to listen. It makes us thoughtful of the concerns of others. It also gives us insight to *“…correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2)* when it is necessary. Those who have the Spirit of Christ will have the mind of Christ. And those who have the mind of Christ will live a life that looks like Christ. This is true wisdom.

This passage contained many good reminders for me. As I look back on the past few months, I realize how hard it has been for me to be one person. What I mean is that for much of the week, I feel like as a professor, I’m called to share the wealth of scientific knowledge that humans have accumulated. For this, I’ve been trained to highly value my own understanding of things and to look down on things that are difficult to discern. I’ve been trained to find my self-worth in my accomplishments and to rely only on myself. But then outside of work, I’m supposed to be a follower of Christ who teaches the gospel and urges people to put their trust in God. I thus see a lot of myself in the immature Corinthians who wanted to have it both ways. They were glad to belong to the body of believers but unknowingly held on to their old value system. I’m afraid that, like them, my spiritual immaturity and worldliness make me numb to the Holy Spirit’s guidance. But this passage encourages me to see that by simply making myself available to the Holy Spirit, I can be one Christlike person, even in my daily work life. The Holy Spirit isn’t just with me when I’m feeling spiritually high. He is with me all the time, ready to give me discernment about how I can come near to God and do what pleases him. I pray that as this semester continues on, I may learn to acknowledge God’s presence in my life more consistently. I pray that I may come to share the mind of Christ more and more and live as one, God-exalting person who trusts in God and leans not on his own understanding (Pvb 3:5).

By now, the secret to a life of spiritual discernment and effective gospel witnessing should be clear. Only the gospel about Jesus Christ and him crucified has power to solve our fundamental problem of sin and change lives permanently. Only the Holy Spirit can give us discernment to see things from God’s perspective. Let’s each take a good, long look at our lives and make sure we are not trusting in our own wisdom and abilities above God. May the Spirit help each of us to mature as Christlike believers who make right judgments about all things.