

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is to those who are called the power of God and the wisdom of God, dear fellow-redeemed:

The mystery genre has been a best-seller in American literature for a long time. A long, long time. Did you know that many date the American mystery novel from Edgar Allan Poe's classic, "Murders in the Rue Morgue?" That was published in 1841, over 170 years ago! Since then, successful authors like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Graham Greene have made the mystery novel a wildly popular format that has held its place on the best-seller lists for generations.

Do you like mysteries? Many people do, and I think one reason is that they never *stay* mysteries for very long. Right? By the time you reach the end of the book you discover the mystery. You find out what happened and why, and you understand the reasons behind all the events that made no sense to you earlier on.

Today, you and I are here to consider a mystery. Not the Raymond Chandler type, but something far more serious. So serious, in fact, that it's a matter of life or death for every person. This is a mystery concerning God's eternal plan to save mankind. It was what Paul believed and preached, and it's also what we believe and preach. Today, we consider: **THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WISDOM I. It is hidden from the world, II. It is revealed by the Holy Spirit, and III. It lifts us above every judgment.**

I.

We seldom think about it, but in the Near East of the first century, the Apostle Paul had a lot of competition. At this time in history, the arts of rhetoric and public speaking were at their highest flower. There were many convincing speakers out there trying to gain adherents for whatever their cause or movement happened to be. Like them, Paul too had a message to present. But unlike them, the power of his message didn't rest on his personal skill as a public speaker. In fact, Paul would probably have gotten an "F" in speech class. He wrote, "*I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:1-5).

Paul may have gotten an "F" in delivery, but he got an "A" in content! Paul had a one-track mind. All he cared about was the Gospel—Jesus

Christ and Him crucified. All he preached was the Gospel—Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Paul’s message was certainly about wisdom. But he emphasized that it was *not* about “...*the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*” [v.6]

Our President has said that one of the goals of his administration is to “...restore science to its rightful place.” I sometimes wonder what he considers the rightful place of science to be. Personally, it’s hard for me to put a lot of trust in science when science keeps “*coming to nothing.*” Isn’t it true? The wisdom of this age always comes to nothing. Scientists insist that we accept their “facts” as absolute truth, and yet they seem to change their facts with every passing year! For example, until recently, scientists taught as “fact” the idea that undersea coral grows at a uniform rate thereby proving that certain massive coral reefs around the world are over 100,000 years old. But now, apparently, the “facts” have changed. In a study published by the US Geological Survey, scientists now say that the growth rate of coral varies widely, growing rapidly at certain times and not at all at others. So sorry, we made a mistake, turns out you can’t use coral as a geologic “clock” after all. But if you had advanced that argument before the report, you would have been dismissed as a simpleton or a religious crank.

Here is another example. For many years it was accepted as “fact” that all human beings evolved from common ancestors who came from Africa about 200,000 years ago. But then scientists discovered human teeth in a cave in Israel that they say are 400,000 years old. So, apparently, these are the new “facts” that we must all accept because the scientists say so.

How good can the wisdom of this age be if it keeps changing? That’s my point. Paul said that the wisdom he preached wasn’t like that at all! The truths of the Gospel don’t change over time. As Scripture says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8).

The Gospel doesn't change. What a comfort that is in our constantly-changing world! On the other hand, the Gospel *is* a mystery. And one of the things that makes it a mystery is that it is hidden from the world. Paul says, "*We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew.*" [vv.7f]

The wisdom of God is the key that unlocks all knowledge, especially the knowledge of eternal salvation. But Paul calls it a *hidden* wisdom. That's because, by nature, human beings just can't find it out. It's a mystery to them. But not a mystery like a mystery novel, where anyone who can read will solve the mystery in the end. The mystery of God's wisdom is totally locked to the mind of natural man. It's insoluble. He just doesn't have the equipment to receive and understand the wisdom of God.

In verse 14 Paul says, "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" People who aren't Christians just don't get the Gospel. Martin Luther had a great quote about this, he said: "[The unbelievers] are just like a log, a stone, or Lot's wife [after being turned into a pillar of salt]. That's how much natural ability they have to perceive the blessedness of the Gospel."

II.

Rather, Paul says, the mystery of God's wisdom is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. He quotes the Old Testament when he says of the Gospel, "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" [v.9 / Isaiah 64:4]

God's plan to save mankind from sin was so strange, so other-worldly that no one would ever have guessed it in a million years! Isn't it true? If you had to come up with a plan for people to be saved from their sins, what would your plan be? The first thing that comes to mind is work. If you've done things wrong, then work to set them right. Make up for your mistakes

by doing good and being good. That would be my first guess, and it is what most people think Christianity is. But that wasn't God's plan. God's plan was that His holy Son, Jesus Christ, should step into your place and bear the punishment for your sin *for* you, as your substitute. When Jesus died on Calvary's cross, He offered the full payment that your sins required. How do we know God accepted that payment? We know it because of Jesus' resurrection. The empty tomb of Easter morning is proof of your complete justification in the eyes of God. This truth is beyond a shadow of a doubt. Now that's a plan that no one would ever have guessed! In truth, it's a plan that no one *can* guess, or can believe or understand according to their natural ability.

What then is the solution? "*God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.*" [v.10] Through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit has come into your heart and created faith there. It is faith which clings to Jesus Christ as your only Savior from sin and death.

Just as no one knows a person's inmost thoughts better than the spirit of that person himself, no one is better able to reveal to us the mystery of God's wisdom than God's Holy Spirit Himself. Paul says, "*God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*" [vv.10-12]

III.

Finally, Paul tells us something very encouraging about the mystery of God's wisdom: It lifts us above every judgment. For "*he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*" [v.15] By the "spiritual," Paul is talking about you, the believer. The Holy Spirit has brought you to faith and has opened your eyes. So from your point of view the mystery is solved! Now, of course, you are perfectly able to judge and discern how precious are the spiritual gifts God has given you: pardon for

your sins, peace with God, the privilege of prayer, the priceless gift of God's Word, the promise that you're going to live forever in Heaven. Elsewhere Paul says, "*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

But did you notice? Paul says something further here. Not only is the spiritual person the only one who can correctly judge and appreciate *spiritual* things, Paul says that the Christian is the only one who can correctly judge *all* things! "*He who is spiritual judges all things.*" You need a Spirit-worked faith in God to truly appreciate anything in this world. The opposite is true as well—if you don't know God, you obviously won't have a proper appreciation for God's creation. Solomon said, "*The fear of the Lord is the **beginning** of wisdom*" (Proverbs 1:7). Without faith, you can't judge anything correctly.

As I mentioned earlier, if you don't know God, you can't really put science in its proper context. If you don't know God, your appreciation of the arts, and literature, and culture will be totally off. Obviously, if you don't know God, your view of history is going to be really be messed up! And on and on...

But as a Christian, you are different. The mystery of God's wisdom lifts you above, and gives you a superior judgment. You can appreciate the pink light of a sunset on Mount Rainier because you know who created both the sun and the mountain. As a Christian, you can truly appreciate a beautiful work of art like Handel's *Messiah* because you share the faith that inspired it. As a Christian, you can appreciate the incredible beauty and complexity of the human body, because you have faith in the one who formed it. With the Psalmist you can say to the Lord. "*I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well*" (Psalm 139:14).

The spiritual person is lifted above every judgment. "*He himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ.*" [vv.15-16] Not that you'll

never hear judgment, just the opposite. The world is judging Christians all the time. You just don't have to listen. After all, you know the mystery, they don't. You have the mind of Christ, they don't. The same things that are important to Christ are important to you. You've heard the Gospel and you believe it. So really, how can unbelievers sit in judgment over you? They'll keep trying, of course, but one Lutheran writer pointed out how absurd it is for non-Christians to tell Christians how they ought to live. He said, "What folly for those who have not even the ability to receive the things of the Spirit of God, to sit in judgment on these things and on the people who glory in their possessions! Do they mean to instruct Christ? Will they attempt an impossible, presumptuous, blasphemous thing like that?"

Your Spirit-given faith lifts you above every judgment. Even God's judgment! A fearful day of reckoning is approaching for those who have rejected Christ, who loved darkness rather than light. But you have nothing to fear from that Day. "*For you were washed...you were sanctified...you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Corinthians 6:11). You are no longer even under the judgment of God, and on that Day, you will be ushered into eternal life just as certainly as the fact that Jesus died for your sins and rose again for your justification. Jesus said, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life*" (John 5:24). What a day that will be! I wish we were already there! We will be soon.

Human beings, of course, do advance in knowledge. They say that human knowledge is expanding at a rate of more than 2000 pages of information per minute. That means that if you were to read 24 hours a day for fifty years straight, by the time you finished you'd be one and a half million years behind! But who really cares? Most of today's knowledge will be obsolete in fifty years anyway! But there's one thing that won't be obsolete, one thing that will be as fresh, as resonant, as absolutely vital then as it is today—the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the mystery of God's wisdom: hidden from the world, revealed by

the Holy Spirit, and lifting us above every judgment. As God enables us, let us cling tightly to that unchanging wisdom and never let it go. As we confess with the hymnist:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away.
Change and decay in all around I see
O, Thou who changest not, abide with me! Amen.

[TLH 552:2]

— **Pastor Paul G. Naumann**