

Determining Wisdom Superficial or Spiritual

Prayer

Paul has given us some amazing truths. So often a Christian brother or sister will read over a portion of scripture and yet not really understand what is being said.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, So that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 New Living Translation (NLT)

And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. (to spiritual people)

For the wider context here I have been using 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. Please feel free to read this for full context at your leisure.

When we look at these scriptures we can be tempted to skip over this as difficult or confusing. For some Paul's meaning here is illusive. For others his meaning is quite challenging. Whatever the reason for jumping past these scriptures, you're in luck today, we will not be skipping, today we will be digging in.

You see in these particular scriptures in 1 Cor. 2:6-16 Paul is asserting an argument to impact the hearts and minds of fellow believers whose attitudes and lifestyles are not quite living up to their profession of faith.

Paul uses his pull as an apostle of Jesus. One called by God himself to make his arguments. I find it interesting that his first call is for them to be in unity. He does this by reminding the church at Corinth that they are called to be saints together. He also wishes them grace and peace. He obviously feels in wishing them this that they need to be in receipt of God's grace. In context, we can see that he is not trying to scare them however, it seems that his message is that they exemplify God by living together exhibiting grace and peace.

Paul would only do this if the church had become divided. Some of the people in the church were considering themselves better than others of the church. We see the trinary division in that some identified themselves as following Paul, others Apollos and others Christ himself.

This morning can we see how these early church parishioners, specifically the Paul/Apollos sects divided themselves based upon the simple fact of whom they heard the Gospel from? They actually allowed themselves an elitist mentality based on who their pastor was. I say this to point out that was

* From an outline on bible study tools. Paraphrased and revised.

not on the basis of who their saviour was. In the cases where it was, it was not on his message or self, but as a point of pride promoting division in the church.

I love Paul here because he does not condemn these new believers for their error but instead recognizes where they are at spiritually and he expresses his thanks to God for them.

I personally see this as an excellent illustration of how we need to recognize that not everyone may be at our particular spiritual level of development and we need to exhibit grace and love as our brothers and sisters mature in Christ. In some cases, we may be blinded by something that we ourselves need to work on...

So what does Paul do with these carnal, worldly, sinful, less spiritual individuals? He embraces them and thanks God for them.

Now I have one other point... They believed in him and what he was doing. For several months at this time Paul had been working in Ephesus. And they helped and supported him. He felt blessed,

Time for another question... Can you see the maturity from which Paul approaches his brothers and sisters in Christ? He doesn't use condemnation or shame to get what he wants. Instead and contrary to what so many of us have experienced in some business dealings, he looks for the positive and affirms their commitment to keep the faith.

He approaches them in love... Agape Love. Not just feeling but with action. He creates bridges between where they are at and points the road forward to fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

He speaks the truth in love, but it is not a softened truth. He does not rule them out of their involvement in the kingdom of God instead he appeals to them as brothers and sisters to forsake their artificially created divisions and be united in Christ.

Paul is not a stupid man. He is a pastor and he can understand why some would gravitate to him and be proud to follow his teaching. He could understand why some would feel this way about Apollos. After all Apollos was eloquent of speech and could relate the teaching clearly, allegorically and so on. He could bring relevance to what they were learning. This would be appealing wouldn't it. But his concern was not the theology or the doctrine, but rather that they were indulging pride in the superficial to separate themselves one from the other. Some would follow the teaching of the messiah direct from the gospel as related by Peter. His hebraic mindset would colour his presentation of the gospel. Certainly Paul saw that people were picking favourites as a point of division instead of recognizing the truth regardless of source.

Would you say it seems to be human nature for people to try to elevate themselves above one another? Who here this morning has ever experienced; either within yourself or from others, this elitist attitude?

What Paul does is gently discourage cliques and fractional behaviour and clearly here is pointing the church at Corinth back to the fundamental truth of the cross of Jesus. Paul knows that the Christian church is like a triangle with Jesus at the top. As the members get closer to Jesus they get closer to each other.

Turn with me this morning to 1 Corinthians 1:17,18 NIV where Paul explains:

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For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel – nor with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

It is clear here that Paul is exhorting the church to not worship the messenger, nor the form by which the message is presented, but instead to focus on the message. Man's wisdom considers the cross foolishness but God grants his children spiritual wisdom to understand the great significance. We are not saved by the pastor or the eloquence of the message but by the power of God through the sacrifice of Christ. Forget all the other trappings and embrace the true message.

You will see Paul's emphasis as you study 1 Corinthians 1:23-25

But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Paul brings it home in two powerful examples:

First he illustrates life in Corinth. He uses them for an example. He mentions that there are many sophisticated fraternities and sororities and that they screen those who apply for membership. They don't want just anybody and certainly not everybody. What they are seeking is those who are wise by worldly standards. They want the powerful and the noble. A little tongue in cheek he points out that not too many of them are in fact all that wise, powerful or noble. Later on he even points out that if they are going to be arrogant about their spiritual sophistication, not that we have ever met any christian brother or sisters like this eh folks? That they really need to look back at where they themselves came from.

It is a really good thing that he approached them in love first because in Corinthians 6:9-11 NLT he makes the point pretty hard...

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Hit's the old self-righteous, I am better than you divisive attitude pretty hard doesn't he?

Do we consider what grace we ourselves have received and why is it that some would rather lord being more spiritually mature over those who are experience possibly the first grace of their lives? How ironic to use maturity in such an immature fashion.

I stand here this morning as an individual not yet perfected, but willing to change. Blessed and clothed in the righteousness of God. His righteousness based on his grace. Not in my own "significant brilliance" (lol) and sophistication. I stand here not in my own power but endowed with his power to

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make a difference for his kingdom. Not the key word there: “HIS” God loves us we are his chosen people, we have a lot to be proud of. But if we allow our pride to cause division then our pride precludes our destruction and our haughty arrogance before our fall. Identity and confidence in Christ is amazing. We do not need to be superior or put on superficial airs.

Paul’s second example does exactly this... He is saying take me for example. He knows he is intelligent, but he didn’t come with the goal of showing everyone how smart he is or to impress them with his eloquence. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he is redirecting their focus to the primary and fundamental doctrine. He says: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him Crucified.”

The guy was literally an apostle and he knew that neither prideful, arrogant posturing nor acting overly spiritual and intellectually elite was the answer. He wasn’t trying to impress them, but to impress upon them Jesus and his cross.

But wait, was Paul saying there is no more spiritual depth? No that is not his message.

Every week there is a battle behind the keyboard of my computer. There are so many very specific churchy terms that are used between pastors and theologians to discuss the amazing truths of God and his word. There is a tension between two competing objectives for every message that comes across this pulpit.

The first is the Kerygma – this is the facts of the christian walk in blunt and simple terms. It is like the message in the song: Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me the bible tells me so and so this is fact. It is straight forward, there is no multi-layered meaning etc. It is simply an apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is what Paul was focusing the Corinthians back upon. It is understood by all. It is the base. It is the solid foundation but yet also the milk of scripture. Essential this is the foundation of evangelism.

The second is Didache – This is the teaching. This details the explanation of significant facts. A good example of this is the last few teaching sermons. It is simply our responsibility to take the scriptures that God has given us and revealed to us through his Holy Spirit and teach these spiritual truths. The tension occurs because I have a responsibility with respect to lead you to understand for your growth. This goes beyond the basics of Christian faith into the richness of truth in God’s scriptures. It does not refute nor repudiate the Kerygma but rather it opens those truths up to a greater depth.

Christianity is simple and yet it also requires study as there are far more truths theologically, doctrinally and intellectually than the basic facts. In Sunday school most of the lessons are basic facts and principles of Christianity. We take joy and strength from the Kerygma and then the didache takes us to the next level by exposing ourselves to deeper teachings.

Paul reminds the Corinthian church that and each of us that at some point we need to be on strong meat. There is a point at which wisdom develops from the superficial to an amazing and progressive spiritual depth. As leaders in the church we are charged with teaching. Truth is though that no one is ever taught anything. Teachers provide the information, but the student has to pick it up and make it their own.

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But what are we teaching? Are we teaching what the word of God says or the opinion of someone in a book. We we teach the didache it must reconcile 100% with the word of God.

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 NLT Paul says: “Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. No, the wisdom we speak is the mystery of God – His plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.

That said when we look closely at these passages we find that the apostle Paul is making two assertions:

1) There are two kinds of wisdom:

- Temporal / Superficial wisdom – it is the wisdom of today. It is man’s wisdom. It is limited and is usually promulgated by the powers of darkness

What are some examples:

- Naturalism – We live in a closed universe of cause and effect. Our senses are all that there really is.
- Secular Humanism – We as human beings are at the centre of all reality. We should be good to each other but there is no place for the word of the cross. In this philosophy there is not clear definition of what is good and what is evil. It promotes humans living together in harmony without a divinity or higher power
- Hedonism – The universe has no real meaning, so eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die
- New Age Mysticism – reality is found within ourselves and with intense meditation we will come to a greater awareness of who we are and how we interrelate with others.
- Materialism – Wealth and power is the purpose of living. He who has the most toys when he dies wins
- Apostate Christianity – Denies the historic biblical doctrines of our faith , yet still claims to be Christian. Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong is an example. This man ran a full-page ad in the Sept 6, 2005 issue of the Christian Century. Here is what he wrote:
 - In many of its details, the Bible is simply wrong! Epilepsy is not cause by demon possession. David did not write the psalms. The Earth is not the centre of the universe. On other issues of great public concern, the Bible is no longer even regarded as moral. Its verses have bee used to affirm war, slavery, segregation and apartheid. It defines woman as inferior creatures and suggest that homosexual persons be put to death.
 - This Bishop does not even understand the basic principles of exegesis nor does he understand what the word of God is actually saying, yet he claims to be a Christian leader while throwing out The bible and teaching heretical interpretations of the word of God.

2) None of the rulers of this age fully understand

- Now this part is a little bit tricky as the phrase rulers of this age is often used to describe evil or supernatural powers who try to control human destiny. Yet it appear here that Paul is talking about the ones who crucified Christ and since this passage is about the believer who has the Spirit and the non-believer who does not have the Spirit that Paul is referring to human leaders.

3) No one can figure this wisdom out on their own

- It is impossible to come to this truth of God without God's specific revelation. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10
 - This is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets

4) God has revealed his wisdom by his Spiritual

- As people we selectively reveal to others what we want them to know about ourselves. If we do not want to share our inner thoughts who can know your deepest most innermost thoughts?

To paraphrase an ogre named Shrek. "People have layers... like an onion". People only reveal themselves in layers. Even in counselling situations do we ever plumb the depths in a couple of sessions. Sometimes it takes years.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:11:

"For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God"

God initiates his self-disclosure to you that is why you can understand him through prayer and the study of his word.

I think our fifth assertion sums it up nicely.

5) For you have received not the Spirit of this world but the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 NIV

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.

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

You have a spiritual tutor. When you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal saviour he gave you the Holy Spirit. This is God himself who reveals himself to you in the depth of his word.

Unspiritual people do not receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and so to many the revelations of his word appear to them as foolishness. But you have been given the very mind of Christ. You who are spiritually alive to Jesus no longer dwell in the realm of the superficial but rather in the spiritual.

Let me close with 1 Corinthians 3 NLR

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. I had to feed

you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. ⁹For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.

Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say,

"He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness."

And again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless."

So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.