

Prayers

To God

Pray with courage, and ask the Lord to help you with what is on your heart. Trust in His power to do all things.

For myself

Weekly theme: generosity

Father God, You have been generous to me, and I have received much from Your hands. Create in me a heart full of love and compassion, ready to be generous to others and rejoicing in Your power. Give me the courage to open up my life to others and become an example of the Kingdom at work on earth. Let me not be afraid of the Gospel call on my life I pray: AMEN

For others

Seek the Lord's will for your church and for your friends within it. Pray earnestly for God's grace to become evident in people's lives.

Meditation

*'The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are glad' (Psalm 126:3)*

We are glad because of the love of our God:

Jesus has been raised from the dead!
Angels have proclaimed the Good News!
Satan has been roundly defeated!
Love has won a great victory over sin!
Mercy is triumphant over judgement!
Faith has been fully justified!
Grace has been proved effective!

We are glad because of the love of our God;
And because Jesus has made it known to all.
Now we are saved by faith in Him! Alleluia!

Bible Passage

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

¹ When I came to you, fellow believers, I did not come proclaiming the evidence of God to you in high sounding words or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing whilst I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, ³ and I came to you in weakness, in fear and in much trembling. ⁴ My speech and my preaching did not come to you with persuasive wisdom, but with the evidence of the Spirit and with power, ⁵ so that you might not place your faith in human wisdom but in the power of God.

⁶ We speak wisdom to those who are mature, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are passing away. ⁷ Rather, we speak the wisdom of God as in a mystery, something kept hidden and which God predetermined before time began for our glory. ⁸ For none of the rulers of this age recognised this, and if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But this is what was written,

'No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.'

¹⁰ God has revealed this to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ No one can really know what someone is thinking except the spirit within, and likewise, no one can really know about God except by means of the Spirit of God. ¹² And it is not the spirit of this world that we have received, but the Spirit who is from God; so that we may understand what has been graciously given to us by God. ¹³ So, we speak of these things not in words taught by human wisdom, but in the teaching of the Spirit who interprets spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

¹⁴ Natural people do not receive the things of God's Spirit, for they are folly to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually determined. ¹⁵ But those who are spiritual may evaluate everything, and yet come under no one else's scrutiny; ¹⁶ *'for who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him'* and we have the mind of Christ!

Review

This well known passage begins with the last stanza of Paul's reasoned statement about the wisdom of God and the message of Christ crucified (1:17-2:2 of which the last stanza is 2:1,2). I make no apology for including them in this study as well as the last, because they make sense both at the end of Paul's previous well constructed argument, and also at the beginning of what we read today. The first five verses of our passage, when read together, read like a classic description of the work of an evangelist, who trusts in God and His power to work through preaching for the salvation of souls. This, of course, is how this passage has been understood for centuries.

The Folly of the message of the Cross

But we must remind ourselves, that the message Paul preached is the same Gospel that has now been preached for generations. Moreover, this Gospel says that the love and mercy of God is found in the apparent folly of the murderous death of Jesus on a Cross! Now when put like this, the Christian message makes little sense to those who have never heard it, whether in times past or present. From a human perspective, how can something as foul and defeated as a man slaughtered on a Cross have anything to do with the eternal salvation of humanity? Yet this takes us to the heart of the matter, and we can be sure that when Paul preached, he took time to explain this mystery of God's saving grace. The rest of Scripture is evidence that Paul did precisely this and the results can be found in many other Scriptures which reflect Paul's preaching (Romans 3:21-26, Ephesians 2, Galatians 3:10-14).

The Gospel is the product of God's Wisdom and power

Here, Paul does not go over the details of the message of salvation. Instead, he appeals to the Corinthians to recall how the message became effective, saying, *'my speech and my preaching did not come to you with persuasive wisdom, but with the evidence of the Spirit and with power'* (2:4). In this way, he reminds the Corinthians that the Gospel is driven forward not by human effort and wisdom but by God's power (2:5). It is not that Paul rejects his intellect or that of anyone else, he is simply arguing that this is not what determines the effectiveness of the Gospel. From his day to this, great preachers, musicians and servants of the Lord have striven for Gospel, but its forward energy is not primarily dependent upon their intellect, effort or charisma. It is dependent on the activity of the Holy Spirit and the power of God (2:4).

The next paragraph (2:6-13) can be hard to understand. It contains some important themes, such as the ignorance of the *'rulers of this age'* who *'crucified the Lord of glory'* (2:8), and it continues the important theme of the working of the Holy Spirit, *'the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God'* (2:10). But what is Paul trying to say? What is this paragraph all about? Altogether, these verses describe the way

God has worked through history to gradually reveal His plan of salvation using the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God; salvation is a plan '*kept hidden*', but '*pre-determined ... for our glory*' (2:7). Paul makes his case that the Gospel is not communicated by natural gifts, but spiritually; '*we speak these things not in words taught by wisdom, but in the teaching of the Spirit who interprets spiritual things to those who are spiritual*'. (2:13).

Paul illustrates this by saying that just as the human spirit alone knows the heart of a man or woman, so the Holy Spirit alone knows the heart of God (2:11). So because the Christian has received the Spirit of God, he or she can know God's purposes and eternal will (2:12f.). This is important because the eternal purposes of God are to save humanity and the whole world, something not dependent on worldly authorities, the '*rulers of the age, who are passing away*' (2:6), but something that is spiritual discerned (2:12,13). Remember, Paul was speaking to people who genuinely believed that the Roman Empire was the established and permanent 'world order', in much the same way we regard commercial capitalism as the permanent means of wealth and structure underpinning our world order today. Yet God works on a far larger landscape of human history, in which every apparently permanent human 'order' occupies no more than a short interlude within the passage of time.

God's wisdom, hidden in the past, and now revealed

The Old Testament describes many thousands of years during which God's purposes were '*kept hidden*' (2:7), though firmly established and '*pre-determined*' in His will (2:7). But in Christ, the Holy Spirit has been let loose to reveal God's plan of salvation, '*so that we may understand what has been graciously given*' (2:12); and once revealed, there is no going back. The mystery of God's eternal plan is now '*revealed to us through the Spirit*' (2:10), even though '*no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived*' (2:9) the amazing love of God in Christ by which we are saved!

This truth is a mystery revealed by the Spirit, it is not a subject of debate! But in their divisions and strife, the Corinthians had allowed church life to be dominated by all manner of human factors; feelings, criticisms, intellect, attachment to charismatic leaders, and much more, as we will discover; they had let the world become the governing force of church life rather than allow the Spirit to be their guide. It was Paul's duty to pull this influential church back to its roots and remind them that they were built on the revelation of God through His Spirit (3:10f).

The importance of the Holy Spirit to the work of God

The Holy Spirit is named seven times in this passage! This is no accident. Later in this letter we will find that the Corinthian church believed it was very spiritual, because to was blessed with people who experienced and used many spiritual gifts (ch12). But Paul would soon be reminding the Corinthians that all these gifts come from the same Holy Spirit of God by which salvation comes (12:4), and His gifts should work inter-dependently in the church (12:12f.). The Holy Spirit has one job description, which is to make the Gospel effective in the world. Before Christ, the Holy Spirit could only be seen in the work of the prophets or the deeds of great characters such as some of the kings of Israel and Judah. In Christ, the Holy Spirit now directs God's eternal and ever active mission of salvation; He is not a private benefit package, He drives the delivery of the Gospel to the world.

At the end of our passage (2:14-16), we are reminded that God's work through the Spirit cannot be understood by natural methods; it is '*spiritually evaluated*' (2:14). But we must be cautious here, because these verses contain a word play on the phrase '*the mind of the Lord*' and '*the mind of Christ*' (2:16). The best way to understand what is going on is this; Paul was chastising the people at Corinth who were refusing to receive Paul's further teaching, claiming they now had the '*mind of Christ*' and now needed no further help. Paul replies that when he preached the Gospel (2:1-5), he '*had the mind of Christ*' (2:16) and was led by the Spirit according to revelation (2:6-13), something that was proved in the very foundation of the church in Corinth. So he appeals to this same church to stop treating the Gospel as a personal toy or status symbol, and be ready to receive more of God's revelation and also more of the true working of the Holy Spirit!

Discipleship

Application

Relying on the Spirit and the power of God

It is still easy for Christians to be awed by the charisma, skill, musicianship or preaching abilities of great people. Many a church is built upon such a leader, but the real question remains this. Is the work of God driven by the qualities of the leader or by the energy and power of the Holy Spirit? The two can work together, but be careful, for often, they do not. An apparently great leader can too often dominate a church, giving little opportunity to those within it to develop their spiritual gifts and God given abilities. Also, the promotion of messages, booklets, podcasts and other semi-commercial activities can lead some to give greater value to personal financial reward than the work of God in the world.

In contrast to this, the spiritual leader will be like Christ, self effacing and willing to be a servant of the Holy Spirit in all things, in preaching, in deed and in all aspects of church life. Following the Holy Spirit is ultimately the only way for the Church of God to go forward, and the fruits of leadership will become evident over time as God blesses what is done, perhaps not immediately, for we shamefully want too many quick results, but over the medium and long term. When the Holy Spirit is in charge of a church, the worship of Jesus is paramount and the God's people are committed to Jesus commands to love and serve other people just as their Saviour showed in His life, and Paul urged in his letters.

The Spirit is not a religious option

Scripture reminds us here that we live in an age in which the Spirit has been let loose for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. We no longer live in Old Testament times, when God's Spirit was occasionally glimpsed through special people. Everyone who is baptised should know that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on them so they can be effective as God's servants in the world and in God's mission of saving grace. What a privilege, and what a commission!

As God's people, let us not argue over our intelligence to understand the things of God, but rather, accept the leading of the Spirit in our collective mission to bring salvation to all people. Let us be willing to follow our common guide, the Holy Spirit, who is 'God with us' as we joyfully do the work He has given us to do.

Ideas for what to do

- *Write down what you would say to someone who asks you what you believe about Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Imagine that someone who is very sceptical has asked you this, and you need to defend your faith well.*
- *What does this passage suggest to you about how you believe and demonstrate your faith?*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *What does this passage say to you about the Gospel, how it is preached and how it is received?*
2. *In the life of your church, how is the Gospel demonstrated through works of power?*
3. *How can God's people ensure that they remain spiritually mature and sensitive?*

Final Prayer

Lord God, You see far beyond our sight, You hear above our hearing, and You speak words beyond our understanding. Yet, through our Saviour Jesus, we are privileged to see You, to hear You, and to speak with you; for in Him, Your re-creative power has given us new life! Thank You Lord God. AMEN