

## **A CRISIS OF TRUSTING THEIR OWN WISDOM**

**by Doug Goins**

---

As we celebrate the last week in the life of the Lord Jesus before he went to the cross, we'll have opportunities to reflect on the things that Jesus knew in his heart about what lay before him. The week that he spent in Jerusalem was, in one sense, a week of preparing him for the cross. It was also a week of continuing the teaching and preaching ministry that he had faithfully been carrying out for three years. The gospel records of that last week tell us that Jesus went to the temple every day and continued to expound supernatural truth. He spoke with tremendous authority about spiritual things that his listeners didn't know anything about. Even that last week Jesus seemed to read people's minds, answering questions before they were asked and identifying hidden motives behind people's behavior. He spoke of unseen things with comfortable familiarity: what God is like, the nature of angels, life after death. He even foretold the future, the end of the world, and the consummation of all things.

His disciples had a growing sense of foreboding, even despair that week. They knew that he would face death, and that they were going to lose the most important influence in their lives. Their struggle wasn't just the loss of his physical presence, but also the loss of his wisdom, counsel, and help.

On the evening before his betrayal, trial, and crucifixion, as they were gathering together to celebrate Passover in the upper room, Jesus made an amazing promise to the twelve. The apostle John recalls these words of promise in John 14-16. They are addressed not only to the disciples but to us as well, his followers. Jesus said,

**"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans...But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you...When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me...I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." (14:14-16-18,26; 15:26; 16:12-13.)**

In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 the apostle Paul will expand on this promise that Jesus made about the coming of the Holy Spirit who would teach the disciples.

In this letter we've already seen that when Paul came to Corinth, he found a city that was committed to human wisdom. Even after the church had begun in the city of Corinth, the Christians were still enamored with the wisdom of the philosophers. They were divisively choosing which leaders they were going to follow, as if they had forgotten the promises Jesus made in the upper room. They were trusting their own wisdom rather than God's wisdom. But in our studies thus far, Paul has clearly shown us how the cross of Christ undercuts all boasting in humanity's wisdom or power or glory. We're going to see in this passage that there is in fact a legitimate wisdom. As Paul explains, it is the wisdom of Jesus Christ, and it is understood only by people who have been given the Holy Spirit to indwell them. And at the heart of this wisdom is a love relationship.

This is a very complicated passage. The apostle Peter said that there are some things in Paul that are hard to

understand. I had that experience last week as I was trying to take this passage apart.

## **Spirit-given insight into life**

In this opening section, Paul describes the content of this wisdom of God. We'll see a contrast between it and natural, worldly wisdom. Verses 6-10a:

**Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written,**

**"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
And which have not entered the heart of man,  
All that God has prepared for those who love Him."  
For to us God revealed them through the Spirit...."**

What God has revealed, Paul says, is this body of truth that is the greatest wisdom of all. And Paul is not writing here about religious information that only people who go to church care about, or philosophy of religion. He is speaking about ultimate insight into life, insight that allows us to understand ourselves and the world around us. This is the truth that everybody everywhere is always searching for. It's the mystery of how to get along with people. It's the secret of how to deal with guilt and fear in our lives. It's the wisdom we need to help our hurting marriages, to help us love our children and respect our parents. This wisdom contains vital truth about God, about humanity and about our place in the universe. These life-changing insights are things we desperately need to understand.

In verses 6-10a Paul lists four aspects of this wisdom of God. First, verses 6-7 say that the wisdom of God is eternal, not transitory. It doesn't originate in this passing world, with the rulers of this age. It originated before time began in the mind of God. Human wisdom is transitory because, Paul says, its creators are passing away. One of the consistent characteristics of worldly wisdom is that it has a very short shelf life. The current thinking in psychology and sociology will soon be set aside for newer theories. Remember when all the experts told us that divorce didn't hurt the children? That was only twenty years ago. Now family theory says it is very damaging and destructive to children, no matter how hard the parents try to shield them. But the wisdom of God has always said that he hated divorce. God loves people and he loves relationships. God's wisdom understands that divorce damages people, including the children of divorce. God's wisdom is not a passing fad that is going to change in the next decade. It is truth that remains unchangeable forever.

The second aspect of the wisdom of God is found at the end of verse 7: The wisdom of God is for our glorification, our personal benefit. Glorification means to make us just like Jesus, to completely finish the process of sanctification. God's wisdom was given to define for us who we were created to be. No matter what we feel like right now, finally, by the end of our lives, we will be the kind of people we want to be. We'll be just as loving, merciful, patient, kind, strong, and self-controlled as Jesus. We'll become glorified men and women, filled with the grace and beauty of Jesus Christ. That is the ultimate goal of salvation.

Third, verses 8-9 tell us that the wisdom of God is impossible to understand through natural processes. No philosopher working outside of a Christian framework ever unfolds this reality. We can't learn about it in a university. No psychologist who is not submitted to the Bible knows anything about it.

This beautiful quotation in verse 9 from Isaiah 64:4 tells us three ways this mystery can't be understood. First, it tells us that it can't be discovered by observation: "...Things which eye has not seen." That refers to empirical investigation. Second, listening to voices from the past will not uncover it: "...And ear has not heard...." People won't hear about it in human history. And third, it's not even available to human reason: "Things...which have not entered the heart [mind] of man...." The bottom line is, humanity cannot penetrate this wonderful wisdom. But God unlocked it for those of us who have been called into a love relationship with him: "...Those who love him." Again, having spiritual wisdom is not about knowing religious information.

It's about loving the Lord and trusting him for understanding to live a life of grace and beauty.

The opening phrase in verse 10 tells us the fourth aspect of the wisdom of God, which is how he gives us that understanding: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit...." The non-Christian rulers (verse 8) Herod, Caiaphas, and Pilate had no idea what they were doing when they collaborated to kill Jesus Christ. And the rulers of today—the opinion-makers, the people who influence how we think—don't understand God's wisdom. It has been made clear only to us who have received Christ and have been filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a result of divine revelation through the Holy Spirit upon God's initiative.

### **How the Spirit communicates to us**

The next section talks about the privilege we have to share this life-saving truth in Christ. In this section Paul calls it the depths of God, or the thoughts of God. Verses 10b-13:

**...For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows 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 freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.**

Only the Holy Spirit knows both God and humankind. In a sense the Spirit stands between us and God. God gave us the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised his disciples in John 14-16, to counsel us, to teach us, to clarify this life-changing wisdom that is available in the word of God. We're given this wisdom to set us free to live a life of exciting adventure. Paul tells us in this beautiful analogy about communication in relationship, why we have to have the Spirit communicating between us and God. In a relationship between two people, unless one person expresses himself, the other person can't tell what is going on in his spirit. The Holy Spirit, as part of the Godhead, has an intimate relationship with the heavenly Father and knows everything. So the Holy Spirit is the perfect one to open up the heart of God to us. The Holy Spirit also knows what is going on inside of us, even if we're not talking; he reads us and understands the needs that are there. So there is a beautiful communication that the Holy Spirit accomplishes.

Verses 12-13 give four steps in the method the Spirit uses to communicate the depths or the thoughts of God to us. First, he comes inside us: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God...." (verse 12a). Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit was with them, but soon would be in them. At Pentecost the Spirit entered into the believers, including the apostles who were to write the inspired Scriptures for us. And everyone who comes to Christ by faith and opens their heart to receive the gift of salvation is filled up with the Holy Spirit. It's a package deal.

Second, the Holy Spirit gives us understanding: "...That we might know the things freely given to us by God...." (verse 12b). What Paul is talking about here is the whole realm of truth and wisdom that God has given us in the Scriptures, which we understand and nonbelievers don't. Remember, before you were a Christian, how hard it was to make sense of the Bible, and how boring it was? You might have sometimes given it your best shot in Bible study, but it was impenetrable. But remember the difference after you came to Christ? The Bible came alive! I'm involved in a study with a group of men, and there are several new Christians in that group. It is so exciting to watch the living word of God change them. For the first time in their lives it makes sense, it's real for them. That's the understanding that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Third, in verse 13a, the Holy Spirit empowers us to speak: "...Which things we also speak...." He gives us the very language that we need to make conversation about these profound, divine truths of verse 12 possible. And the "we" that Paul uses here includes not just himself and his apostolic co-workers, but also the (mature) Corinthian Christians, and us as well. The truth that we receive from the Scriptures, we pass on to others. And even though we may not feel that we make a lot of sense, we can be confident that the Spirit will apply that truth.

That's the point of the last phrase in verse 13 and the fourth step in the Spirit's method of communicating: "...Combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." The Revised Standard Version says, "...Interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit." The New International Version says, "...Expressing spiritual truth in spiritual words." These three translations are not very similar, partly because it's a tangled Greek phrase that Paul uses. The three English verbs-combining, interpreting, expressing-are all trying to get the meaning of the Greek word, which literally means to fit pieces together perfectly, like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together. Paul is defining the process by which the Holy Spirit takes the great principles of life that we find in the Scriptures, things that relate to our identity and our place in the universe, the facts of God's secret wisdom that are revealed; and applies them to us personally, to our individual circumstances. And then the word comes alive for us, and it makes sense for us.

It's amazing to me to see how the Spirit speaks in different ways to different people in Bible studies. And when I preach, people will come and tell me they were really impacted by some point that came out of the text, and I won't even remember saying it. The Spirit is a powerful teacher. He will take the text and bring it to life, with or without the help of a preacher or teacher. He will fit it together in your life and in my life.

### **Having the mind of Christ**

In verses 14-16 Paul is going to conclude this discussion of God's wisdom by explaining why it is that not everyone can understand these things. Paul divides the human race into two categories: the natural person who cannot perceive the depths or thoughts of God because they are without saving faith in Jesus Christ; and the spiritual person who has been given spiritual perception of God's wisdom through the saving life of Christ.

**But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.**

The Greek word translated "natural" refers to the principle of physical life. It defines somebody who lives life purely on the physical level (even though we were created as spiritual beings), as if there were nothing beyond the physical world. Their natural values are physical and material. A person like that cannot understand spiritual things. They are controlled by feelings, moods, urges, felt needs, desires; by natural reasoning, logical choices made on the basis of goals centering on this life, like success, wealth, power, and pleasure. That's how the man or woman of the world thinks, and the world reinforces it. The person who thinks this way is defined as sophisticated. But the bottom line is that it is instinctive; we were all born that way.

Verse 14 summarizes the limitations that the natural person lives with. They are excluded from the wisdom of God, literally shut out from the things of God, because their nature dictates it. The natural person is unable to understand the wisdom of God, and they don't want to understand it anyway. The things of God don't make sense to them because they lack the necessary "equipment" to discern the wisdom of God: the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Without the Spirit, the natural person cannot see the logic in Christianity. They don't have a basis for accepting the claims of Jesus Christ on their life.

Forty years ago William Barclay, the Scottish New Testament commentator, gave this description of the natural man or woman:

"A person like that cannot understand spiritual things. A man who thinks that nothing is more important than the satisfaction of the sex urge cannot understand the meaning of chastity. A woman who ranks the amassing of material things as the supreme end of life cannot understand generosity. A man who thinks his appetite the last word cannot understand purity. A woman who has never thought beyond the things of this world cannot understand the things of God, to her they look like mere foolishness."

Paul gives a contrasting perspective in verses 15-16. But before we look at that, we need to understand that the only reason we ourselves aren't still living as natural men and women is that God miraculously entered our

lives. It is a gift of grace that we can see reality now. So we have nothing to be proud of; we're not superior to natural men and women, just saved. That's the only difference. "He who is spiritual" refers to the person who possesses the Holy Spirit and who is willing to obey the teaching of the Holy Spirit. In Paul's words to the Galatians (5:16), "...Walk by the Spirit...." Paul is using the word "spiritual" in the broadest sense, referring to anyone who possesses the Holy Spirit, or all Christians. In Romans 8:9 the apostle writes, "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Paul also says in 8:14 that if we are led by the Spirit of God we are sons and daughters of God. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual believer is the mark of a true Christian.

However, Paul is going to explain in chapter 3 that it is possible to be a Christian and have the Holy Spirit but not always obey him. Paul will describe for us the tragedy of a Spirit-filled Christian who is living like a natural person. He calls such a one a carnal person, or a man of flesh, or an immature Christian.

But what Paul does in the three clauses that remain in 2:15-16 is describe what it means to be spiritual in a narrower sense. He is describing people who consistently obey the teaching of the Holy Spirit. As a result of that consistency, they have great potential for being used of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Verse 15 says, "He who is spiritual appraises all things...." That means that we really can exercise moral judgment, because we have thoroughly studied the mind of the Lord in the Old and New Testaments. We have prayed about difficult issues and have examined them from every side; we have put them through the grid of Biblical absolutes. Therefore we have the courage to take a position on values and issues that the natural world is totally confused about. We have the courage to speak out on the wrongness of abortion; the destructiveness of the homosexual lifestyle; and the sins of materialism, racial bigotry, and oppression of the poor and needy.

There is another clause that follows immediately in verse 15: "...Yet he himself is appraised by no man." That says that we are beyond natural human judgment. If we can judge all things, we aren't judged by the natural value system. He is talking about being unjustly evaluated by non-Christians or by Christians who are employing worldly standards, people who have no sense of who we are in Christ. In reality the natural world can't figure us out. Our lifestyle appears strange to worldlings.

In C.S. Lewis' novel *Till We Have Faces*, he tells the story of a young woman who is married to a prince. They had a wonderfully loving marriage. The princess lived in the beautiful castle of her husband, and every day she banqueted at a sumptuous table with him. The prince attentively met all of her needs. The only problem was that the castle and the prince were invisible to everyone but the princess, even though they were real and true. All that the princess' neighbors could see was imaginary conversations around imaginary tables with imaginary people. So they labeled the young woman crazy because they couldn't understand what was true.

We will be evaluated in the same way because of our understanding of the mind of God. We will hold convictions that other people don't, based on a different set of absolutes. We will be kind and compassionate at times when others are cruel. We will be intolerant when other people are very tolerant. It's all because we have insight into the mind of God.

My wife Candy and I faced this in the last couple of years. We have been seen as naive or as living in a fantasy world because we refuse to encourage our teenage daughters to go on birth control. On one occasion a mother challenged Candy and told her that she was tremendously unrealistic about what kids are really like today in not giving our daughters birth control. Our pediatrician tried to convince Candy that our daughters should go on birth control, and Candy stood up to her and said, "You have no right or understanding to give me advice in this area." God says that we are called to a lifestyle of chastity, and it is reality for teenagers.

The reason we can stand and not live with any sense of being appraised by the natural mind is what Paul says in the last verse: "But we have the mind of Christ." We have the very same ability that Jesus himself had to evaluate the changing standards of natural humanity, to come right to heart of an issue, and to know what's inside a person, because we're growing in identifying with them. We learn to behave as Jesus did, to show mercy and compassion to the poor, the obscure, the unattractive, people of no position or influence. Remember Jesus' loving acceptance of the woman taken in adultery. He said in essence, "Where have all your accusers gone? I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more." (Mark 8:11.) But then he could be prophetically

challenging as well. Remember how Jesus confronted the rich young ruler in Luke 18, telling him that if he wanted to follow Jesus, he was to give away everything he had.

I concede that there are very few of us who consistently manifest the mind of Christ. But we are all in the process of being conformed to his image. Verse 16 is a quote from Isaiah 40:13-14: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him?" It takes us back to the quote in verse 9:

**"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
And which have not entered the heart [mind] of man,  
All that God has prepared for those who love Him."**

That is not about heaven, although it's often used at funerals. It is clear in the context of Isaiah 64 that it means life here and now. God wants to reveal these things to us. He has done so out of love. Trusting him for understanding and cultivating this love relationship with him means that we will grow in greater and greater understanding of these eternal realities. God will transform our thinking when our roots go deep into his word. The Bible is not an operations manual. It really is a love letter from a loving heavenly Father.

This week we'll be remembering the act of sacrificial love that led Jesus to the cross. It was love that motivated God to open up the mystery of the gospel, to reveal the depths and thoughts of his wisdom, and to give us the mind of Christ.

But perhaps none of this makes sense to you, and in reality you are still living as a natural man or woman. You have not come out of the darkness of that natural life into the brilliance of the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. I encourage you to pray, "Lord, help me to understand. Open up the windows of my perception. Help me see what is real." And keep on asking the Lord to give you that.

In January and February there was a woman named Kelly Monroe who was involved in our church. Kelly is a chaplain at Harvard University and has worked with students there for a number of years. She wrote the book *Finding God at Harvard*. Kelly told the pastoral staff of how she came to this saving life in Jesus Christ. She lived her entire life until high school in darkness, as a natural person. She was raised in an aggressively anti-Christian, atheistic, rationalistic home. Both of her parents were Ph.D.s in psychology. She never went to church in her life and never heard anything religious, because her parents were convinced it that was dangerous.

When she was in high school she played field hockey, and some Christian girls on her team invited her to come to see them in an Easter musical on the life of Christ. Kelly said the entire text came out of the gospel accounts of the passion narratives of Christ. She went by herself on a Thursday night, sat in the balcony in the dark so nobody would see her, and listened intently, following the text along. She came back Friday night by herself, sat in the darkness in the balcony, and followed the text along. She came back Saturday night by herself, and the word of God exploded in her life. She said that by the time Saturday night was over, she had opened her heart to Jesus Christ, because of the power of the word of God. She said, "I understood the gospel was about a relationship, not religion."

I want to hold that possibility out for you today, if this hasn't yet made sense to you. God desires nothing more than to give you the wisdom of his mind and heart.

Catalog No. 4512  
1 Corinthians 2:6-16  
Fifth Message  
Doug Goins  
March 23, 1997

The Scripture quotations in this message are all taken from New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

● [Peninsula Bible Church Home Page](#)

- [Discovery Publishing: Books, sermons, tapes.](#)
- 

[Copyright \(C\) 1995 Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.