



Gospel Atmosphere
I CORINTHIANS

So as you know, we have been working through the book of 1 Corinthians and Paul begins by comparing the wisdom of the world with the foolishness of the cross.

And last time we were together we saw Paul's determination to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified which wasn't so much a determination to keep the message simple as it was a determination to keep the message foolish, to focus it on that one thing the world says is of no value and yet is the thing of supreme value.

Why was Paul determined to do this? Because this is the true wisdom which is the source of true power. Jesus Christ crucified, everything Jesus is and everything the cross represents, is the wisdom from above. That's the interpretive key to reality.

When we embrace this true wisdom (which appears as literal foolishness in the eyes of the world) it literally "changes everything." It gives you new eyes to see the world through.

The goal of today's message is to explain first, what we mean when we say, "It changes everything" and second how we come to possess that perspective changing wisdom.

It would be a tremendous result if after today your longing for and seeking after Gods wisdom increased and secondly you knew exactly how to seek after it.

The Perspective Altering Wisdom

Now Paul just gets done in verses 1-9 defining the very essence of true wisdom. And then speaking of that true wisdom he goes on to say:

1 Corinthians 2:10-13, These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts 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 understand the things freely given us by God.

Now essentially what he is saying here is that without the Spirit you are blind. What he's saying here is that the language of life is unintelligible unless you have this key that unlocks it, and that key is the Holy Spirit.

Even though you're in it, experience, it's everywhere around you, it's the very air you breathe, it's still to you like a foreign language. It has meaning but to your eyes and ears it makes no sense to you.

You need an interpretive key. He uses a metaphor to explain why the Holy Spirit is that key. He says just like you the only one that knows your own thoughts, well the Holy Spirit knows the mind of God. So if you want God's mind you need God's Spirit.

That's the argumentation. Until you have God's Spirit in you, you will never see what you're supposed to see. What we really need, is new eyes.

Seeing with New Eyes

Now when we say, you need new eyes, what may come to mind is the concept of spiritual blindness. That is a very common metaphor in the Bible, but it's not the best metaphor for what Paul is talking about here. If you are in a dark cave and you have no flashlight, you know you are in trouble. You know you need light and you desperately desire it. That's not how the natural man feels toward the Spirit.

Let me give you a different analogy that I think describes the type of blindness that Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians.

Lisa and I do what I think every couple does from time to time. We notice the ways in which we are similar and we notice the ways in which we are different.

This is really obvious when we walk through a house or a building. I'll notice how a building was built, the craftsmanship of certain

pieces of furniture. Why? Because I like building things and I notice that kind of stuff. Lisa on the other hand will tend to notice how colors go together and artwork. Why? Because she is more artistic.

We will get out of the building and she will say, "Didn't you love the colors in the painting? Not only did I not notice the colors, I didn't even know there was a painting."

And if I walk back in, sure enough there's this 16 foot giant painting on the wall.

And she'll say you are so unobservant. And I'll say, "Oh yeah, did you notice the hole scheduling of the grade #8 galvanized carriage bolts in the rafters?"

No? So whose unobservant, now? She'll come back with some snarky comment like, "Well we definitely know whose weird."

How is it that we can live the exact same moment together and yet notice and observe totally different things?

5 people might drive to McCall and all five might notice different things.

- Hunters might notice the hunting rigs and be scouring the hills for deer and elk
- A painter might notice the fall colors
- An civil engineer might think about vector math as he drives over rainbow bridge
- A botanist might notice invasive species and beetle kill
- The guy in charge of the highway litter program might notice a tire iron, an old coat and which section of the road those items were found on.

And here's what we are trying to point out, "You see what you want to see." You find what you are looking for.

The reason I think this analogy is helpful is because it parallels very closely the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world.

In a very real sense, we walk around this world and we see what we are looking for. If you look for ways to make money, you'll see it. If you look for art, you'll see it. And if you aren't looking for God's wisdom, you won't see it. The wisdom of God is in plain sight all the time. It's everywhere. It's obvious. It's so evident.

- But if you aren't looking for it,
- if you haven't been trained to appreciate it or pick it out of the landscape,
- if you don't value it,
- if you don't have the tools to observe it,

you'll miss it entirely and see something else. You'll pass over diamonds thinking they are sand. It's there but you aren't looking for it. You don't even know how to detect the most valuable thing in the world.

The Diamonds in 1 Corinthians 2

Now I want to point something out to you that I hope will happily surprise you. This is one of those plain as day things. This is one of those things that your eyes perhaps has seen a thousand times but maybe you've never really seen it. It's never impacted you. It's never just got ahold of your spirit.

What is the main thing the Holy Spirit helps us see? What's the main way in which he reinterprets reality for us. When we open up

our eyes with this new set of eyes, what is the thing that would just shock you and blow you away, and you'd say, "Wow, I can't believe I've missed that my whole life but there it is as plain as day and now seeing it for the first time, it just changes everything! What's the main thing? The text tells us as plain as day. We've already read it. And maybe, even now, you are seeing it for the first time. Look again at verse 12

1 Corinthians 2:12, Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.
(ESV)

What we need more than anything else is to understand the things freely given by God? Was that your first guess as to the thing you are most unable to see without the Spirit of God. When you think of total blind spots, spiritual astigmatism, when you think of spiritual blindness, very few - if any of us - think in terms of "inability to understand the things freely given by God."

What a transformational way to look at Spiritual growth! Spiritual growth is the increasing ability to see the things freely given us by God. Those who are filled with the Spirit are most aware of what's spiritually available for free. Isn't that counterintuitive? And when

you start thinking about this, it squares very nicely with many other passages in the Scriptures that speak of this roll of the Holy Spirit.

What does Paul pray for the Ephesians church?

Ephesians 1:17-19, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might (ESV)

Do you see that Paul's prayer is that the Ephesians is exactly what we are talking about here - that they would see and understand the freely available gifts of God? I'd love to write a book with that title. "See what's free." But since I never will, any of you feel free to run with it.

Isn't this amazing that the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is to enable us to see what is free. I had this strange moment this week. This truth was really impactful to me this week and I felt like I was seeing it for the first time.

Just for fun I went back and pulled out my old Bible, the old crusty one that I've had forever, and I opened it up and there highlighted and underlined is the very phrase in this very verse. I had seen it

before but I had never really seen it. There is it, underlined, highlighted, stared but even though my eyes were right there, I had never seen it.

It's like every year, God presses into me the basic truth that Jesus loves me. And every year that sentence is more and more profound.

And I have people tell me that all the time. Man, I never heard that before. I mean, I guess I had heard those words or that content many times before, but it never clicked. How could I have missed it? But I did miss it. It never made sense to me. Oh, I mean, I thought it made sense to me, but now I realize it hadn't made sense to me. But now I realize, I thought I had understood it, but I really hadn't understood it, at all."

God help us to continue to see that which is free.

Why We Can't See Free

Now a good question that arises at this point is quite simply, "Why is it hard to see that which is free?" Aren't we normally trained to spot free everywhere we go? I'm guessing that word on signs has caused more accidents than cell phones. We love free. So why is it so hard?

Here's why: when this illumination comes, when the light bulb turns on and when the Spirit of God helps you to see what God is really, truly, freely offering, it's always traumatic.

Always!

Think about how this came about in the experience of the apostle

Paul himself. Think about when Paul for the first time saw the free gift of grace.

Paul was a young man, and when he looked at himself through his natural eyes, what did he see? He saw his virtuous self.

- He looked in the mirror and saw a very religious man.
- There he was circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;
- as to the law, a Pharisee;
- as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
- He loved God.
- Then the Christians came, and he hated those Christians.
- as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;
- These stinking Christians brought out the worst in him.
- In Acts 8 we are told that he held the coats of the ones who were executing Stephen (in Acts 8).
- Then he went into a towering rage. He hated those Christians, and he went after them.
- He began to arrest them, and he began to put them to death.

Then the lightning bolt struck. On the road to Damascus, a literal light from heaven knocked him to the ground, there was this moment of divine illumination that exposed him.

It showed him underneath that skin-deep veneer of being so righteous and so blameless there was this terrifying, hideous monstrous self:

- He had serious coveting issues,
- fear issues,
- drive for self-glory,
- stroking his ego, nursing his pride, a love of violence.

It was there all along in plain daylight. But he hadn't seen it. He was completely blind to it. He didn't have the organ to interpret what was right before him. He had deceived himself that he had been so righteous and yet underneath there was this insidious wolf.

Underneath there was this monstrous ego, and he was going to get glory, and he was going to feel superior to other people, and he didn't care who he trampled in order to get that sense of glory, self-glory.

He looked in the mirror and he saw a hideous monster. When you first see it, it's always terribly traumatic.

You see the reason we are blind to the things that are freely available to us is that in order to see what is free we first have to apprehend and confess that we need what is free. It's like someone offering you deodorant. In order to receive it you have to admit you stink. In order to see what's free we have to admit our spiritual stink. And we resist that.

It's the kind of resistance you feel when perhaps you are fighting with your spouse and you get into a gridlock and the other person stops and says, "Maybe we should get some counseling." Well, I'm not going to say I'm perfect, but I don't need that kind of help. I'm not going to lower myself to that. Listen, I'm open to a tips and tricks seminary but I'm not one of those really messed up people that needs serious help.

- Because, look how successful I am.
- Look at how many people like me. The problem is not me it's you. You need counseling.
- Look at the impact I am having. The only impact your having is a negative one on me.
- And out comes the list of self righteousness proving that you don't

need help.

The true blindness is refusal to acknowledge need. It's foolishness in the world's eyes to say, I am needy. I can't do it. I don't need that which is freely available.

The Essential Nature of Blindness

Now we can see the essential nature of this resistance in the next section. Look at verse 13.

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The reason the natural man, according to this text can't understand the gospel, is

- not because the words are gibberish,
- not because he needs some special intellectual insight,
- not because it's too complicated and he just doesn't have enough mental horsepower,

but because the second the words hit his ears and the second he understands the meaning of it, his spirit erupts with offense, "That's foolish!"

The things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man not because he can't see their meaning but precisely because he does see it's meaning and regards what he sees as foolish and weak.

The problem is that when the word of the cross is clear and the intellect of the natural man has interpreted it adequately, he turns up his nose in disdain.

What this text teaches, then, is that all of us by nature recoil from the truth of God; we recoil from the truth of the Bible and from the word of the cross. We hear the call of the gospel to submit to a crucified Christ and we defend ourselves against it...I'm so sure. My biggest problem in life is that I'm not submitting to a crucified Jew and receiving from him this free gift of life. That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

And yet that is the very thing. If we were to zoom out just for a moment, the main point of 1 Corinthians chapters 1–4 is to show that God has accomplished our redemption in such a way that it demolishes human pride because earned righteousness is never accepted. The only righteousness God accepts is the freely given righteousness of Jesus Christ.

You will be saved how? By removing yourself from the center. You will dethrone self. When the natural man hears that, he says that's foolish. Why would I ever do that?

You see the natural man looks at the world and says, what's wrong

with the world, is that I'm not central enough. The structures of the world don't revolve around me. And they should because I'm worthy of it.

The Spirit helps us see another way. What's wrong with the world is that I am too central. It's a tragedy that this world in any way is about us because we are not worthy of that. It ought to revolve around the person from which we have freely received all worth, all joy, all happiness.

The Joy of it All

Now yes, there is terror in beholding the monster we really are. But once the Spirit of God moves in us and we in cooperation with his Spirit choose to receive that which is freely offered to us, the whole of the human Spirit flowers into joy.

1 Corinthians 2:15-16, The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (ESV)

That first verse there is a little cryptic. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. This is most certainly

not saying the Christian is above being scrutinized. By no means. The whole of this letter runs in the opposite direction. Paul is very much judging them.

What he saying is that the person who has received God's Spirit has the privilege of understanding reality. Why? Because God's Spirit is in him. But the world doesn't know what to do with us. When they look at us they don't understand us. Essentially what he is saying is we understand the world but the world doesn't understand us.

Paul ends his argument with this clinching quote from Is 40:13. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Answer - nobody. So on one level it reinforces the idea that in order to understand God we need his Spirit.

But there's another thing going on here that is interesting. If you look at the Is 40:13 passage the word used there is not mind but Spirit. So the word mind is translating this Hebrew word Spirit. In other words the mind of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord are synonymous.

Therefore, when we receive the Spirit of the Lord, we very much have been given the mind of Christ. Now what does that mean? It certainly is not this idea that you have some elitist understanding, this god-like grasp of particle physics or something like that.

Think about it. Who is Christ for Paul? Christ is the crucified one. To participate in the mind of Christ is to participate in the pattern of the cross.

What better place to end here than Philippians 2. It's such a great tie in. Notice here the connection between the Spirit's work, having the

mind of Christ, and telling us what that mind of Christ is.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The Christian has this very precious gift of being able at moments to see this world the way God does. Having the mind of Christ means participating in the pattern of the cross. Embracing it. Choosing it.

Loving it. That is amazing.

When the Spirit reveals it, all of the sudden, we become like Martin Luther. This truth becomes for us like a gateway to heaven. You can see for the first time!

The mind of Christ is available to us when we see what's free. When we embrace our weakness and ask for the Spirit of the living God to change us.