

## DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT'S POWER

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Key Verses: 2:4,5

*“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”*

In today's passage, St. Paul teaches us that God's wisdom is revealed by the Holy Spirit. It means that we should depend on the Holy Spirit, not on human wisdom, in our preaching. Human wisdom has no power to save a person from sin and Satan. Only God has the power to save a person. May God help us to be powerful Bible teachers by depending on the Holy Spirit everyday!

### I. SO THAT YOUR FAITH MAY REST ON GOD'S POWER (1-5)

Last week, we learned that the message of the cross sounds foolish to some people but it is the power of God for those who are being saved. Now in verses 1-5, Paul teaches us what kind of attitude we should have in proclaiming this message of the cross.

Look at verses 1-2. *“When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* Before coming to Corinth, Paul was in Athens (Ac 17:16-34). He was distressed to see that the city was full of idols. The Athenians spent most of their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. The talk shows by Jimmy Fallon and Seth Myers would've been popular there. As Paul reasoned with them, a group of philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” Paul preached to them the Creator God who made the world and everything in it. He told them that God cannot be represented by man's design and skill. He proclaimed to them repentance and the message of Jesus' resurrection. Upon hearing this, some of them sneered and others wanted to discuss it further. But only a few of them believed. Paul was disappointed. He felt that he had failed as an evangelist.

Despite the experience, Paul made a resolution when he came to Corinth. What was that? He decided not to rely on human wisdom. Paul resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (2). Paul wanted to preach the simple gospel. Paul was a scholar. He was a rabbi. He was highly educated. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was an articulate writer as we see in his letter to Romans. But he decided to set aside his human wisdom to preach only Christ crucified. We learn from Paul how we can be good Bible teachers. Some students today are like the people of Athens. They like to socialize and exchange ideas via Facebook and Snapchat. We can talk with them about a lot of things. But we learn from Paul that we should not rely on our human wisdom. We are tempted to beautify the cross, but we do not need to.

Look at verse 3. *“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”* What does this mean? Paul had no confidence in himself. He humbled himself before God. He wasn’t sure how the Corinthians would respond to the message of the cross. He might have been apprehensive. His memory from Athens was still fresh. However, he decided to preach the message of the cross with absolute faith. We learn from Acts 18 that God was pleased with his decision. God came to Paul in a vision and said to him, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half teaching the word of God (Ac 18:9-11). Corinth was a difficult city to pioneer, given its pleasure seeking culture. But Paul preached the gospel boldly there. He did not depend on himself, but on God’s power. Sometimes I wish I could speak with eloquence and a booming voice like that of George Whitefield. But I remember how God has used our missionaries who spoke only broken English to raise up faithful disciples of Jesus, when they shared only the message of the cross.

Let us read the key verses (4,5) together. *“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”* Paul says that his message and his preaching were not particularly wise or persuasive. He preached simply the message of the cross. He resolved to preach only about Christ crucified for the sin of the world. He preached the simple message with absolute faith and conviction. He didn’t say, “You should know the substitutionary effect of Jesus’ deed” with an unconvincing voice. Instead, he proclaimed with conviction, “Jesus died for your sins. He was crucified to take away the sin of the world! No one comes to God except through him!” When he preached the message of the cross, God demonstrated the Spirit’s power by changing the hearts of sinners. A synagogue ruler named Crispus and his entire family members were converted (Ac 18:8). Many penny-pinching merchants accepted Christ as their Lord. Football players repented their sins and became soldiers of Christ. Even foxy girls of the city were changed into women of prayer. It was the power of God that changed these people. Paul said that God demonstrated the Spirit’s power in them. Likewise, we should preach the gospel of Jesus’ cross and resurrection simply and with conviction. We don’t have to worry about the wisdom of our message. Our wisdom cannot change anyone spiritually, no matter how persuasive it is. Only the Holy Spirit can change a person in Christ. To be excellent Bible teachers, we need to have absolute faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

D.L. Moody (1837-1899) was an American evangelist with only a grade school education. He went to England standing before highly educated people and preached the simple message of the cross and of God’s love. It triggered a spiritual awakening for the Cambridge Seven. Even the sarcastic college students were moved by his message and they became missionaries to China. There were many sophisticated preachers at that time, but God used Moody to demonstrate his power when he preached the simple message of the cross.

Verse 5 says, *“...so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”* The gospel is a message of God’s power. Human wisdom is useless for salvation. Faith that rest on human wisdom is useless. It is because only God’s power can set us free from our bondage to sin and death. Only God’s power can change us from useless sinners

to faithful disciples of Jesus.

## II. GOD'S WISDOM IS REVEALED BY SPIRIT (6-16)

In this part, St. Paul contrasts those who are with the Holy Spirit and those without the Spirit. It was his way of gently rebuking the Corinthians that they were lacking in Spirit. Through Paul's ministry they had received the grace of God--the forgiveness of their sins. They were filled with the Spirit. Then they began to lose the Spirit of God. Why? It was caused by their habitual life and spiritual complacency. How about us? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Are you led by the Spirit everyday? If not, what should we do? Let us recognize the seriousness of ignoring the Holy Spirit as we meditate on this passage.

**First, we declare God's wisdom by his Spirit** (6-11). Look at verse 6. *"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing."* Paul teaches us that God's wisdom is different from that of worldly wisdom. When we have God's wisdom, we grow in spiritual maturity. In this information age, we are inundated with all kinds of wisdom and knowledge. If you need to know something, you can simply "Google" it. There are so many self-help books, ranging from Grilling for Dummies to How to Relax. The wisdom of this world brought much progress to human life. But no matter how advanced the wisdom of this age may be, it cannot lead us to God, because we need God's wisdom to know him and his will.

Look at verses 7-8. *"No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* Where and why did God hide his secret wisdom? His wisdom or his salvation plan through his Son Jesus Christ was hidden plainly in the Old Testament, beginning from Genesis 3:15. God had a plan to send his Son as the Savior of the world. Jesus would crush Satan's head through his cross and resurrection. However, none of the rulers of the age, including the Jewish leaders, understood or accepted this wisdom of God. It was hidden from them. Pontius Pilate was an expert in law and politics, but he had the Lord of glory crucified, because he did not understand God's secret wisdom. Why did God hide the wisdom? It was to give it to only the people whom he loved. He did not want to throw the pearl to pigs who would trample on it. He hid the wisdom from those who would not only reject but abuse his love. Look at verses 9-10a. *"However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived'—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit."* When we open our hearts to God, he reveals to us his wisdom by his Spirit. The Spirit moves our hearts to accept Jesus in our hearts. This Spirit also enables us to have spiritual desire to search for the deep things of God (10b). God's Spirit is our spiritual search engine. Instead of "Googling" on the internet, we pray and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 11 says, *"For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."* Nobody knows what is really on another person's mind. We know only what we are

thinking in our mind. I care a lot about Shep. Chris, but many times I don't know what is really on his mind. How then can we know God's mind and heart? Only through the Holy Spirit can we understand God's heart. When Chris first came to study the Bible, he didn't seem like someone who would be changed into a disciple of Jesus, someone who would love his sheep sacrificially. But we thank God because he has come a long way since then. He understands that God's heart is broken over many young people who are dying in their sins. What can we say? It is the work of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus told Nicodemus, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8). Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "... no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

**Second, the Spirit enables us to know the mind of Christ (12-15).** Let us read verses 12-13. *"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."* In Genesis 2, we learn that God created us from the dust of the ground. We became a living being when God breathed his life into us. God created us a spiritual being as well as a physical being. Man = body + spirit. We also learn that there is a spiritual world and there is a physical world. Unfortunately when man sinned before God, both man's body and spirit died. Man came under the rule of Satan—the spirit of the world. That's why Jesus had to come to baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds us that we believers received the Spirit who is from God. We have to know the difference between the life with the Spirit of God and the life without the Spirit of God.

So what was the problem among the Corinthian believers? The problem was that they thought they had a lot of wisdom. They were proud of their own knowledge and wisdom. They were eloquent speakers and great debaters. In their pride, they began to quarrel among themselves. The message of the cross was set aside. In this situation, they could not live a life with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit could not work among them, because they would not open their hearts to God's words.

I feel that we are also lacking in our life with the Holy Spirit. Do you know that the Spirit dwells in each of us who accepted Jesus as the personal Savior? We treat badly the indwelling Spirit in us, putting him in a corner somewhere, and ignoring him. Our life does not show that we are filled with the Spirit. Our personal testimonies lack in spirit. We lack the spirit of seeking God's lost sheep. We know that we need the Spirit of God. How can we have the Spirit of God? We must repent our sins and turn our hearts to God. Jesus says in Luke 11:13 that we should pray to our Father in heaven earnestly so that he may give us the best gift—the Holy Spirit.

We should realize that there is a big difference between a life led by the Spirit of God and one that is led by human wisdom. Consider, for example, the life of King Saul in the Old Testament (1Sa 9). At first, Saul was humble. He had the Spirit of God and he was very powerful. The Spirit of God enabled him to conquer his enemies and establish the kingdom of Israel. However, a short time later, he became proud before God. Saul disobeyed God's servant Samuel and God's words. When he relied on his human wisdom instead of God's command, something terrible happened to him. The Spirit of God left

him (1Sa 13). His life became miserable from that point on. He suffered from the torment of evil spirits. He lost his kingship, his family and finally, and he lost his life in disgrace. We learn that to be led by the Spirit of God, we must humbly obey the word of God.

What happens when we are led by the Spirit? We gain spiritual discernment. Look at verse 14: *“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”* The man controlled by the spirit of this world rejects spiritual things as foolishness. They are blind to the spiritual reality. On the other hand, the man led by the Spirit of God has the privilege of understanding and accepting the secret of God. It is like he has a radio that is tuned to a correct station; he can hear a powerful sermon or listen to beautiful music. But the person who has no radio receiver or no correct tuning cannot hear the sermon or the music. All he can hear is noise. He cannot have spiritual discernment.

Paul says in verse 15: *“The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment.”* Spiritual person can make good decisions with the help of the Holy Spirit. But what does it mean the spiritual man himself is not subject to any man’s judgment? Some people in the Corinthian church try to judge Paul, as they were quarreling with one another. We are told that Paul was a short man who was not handsome. His writings were excellent, but he wasn’t an eloquent speaker. So they judged him based on his human qualities. But Paul says that he wasn’t bound by their judgment. He had the spiritual eyes to see through their problems. He was free in Christ.

Look at verse 16. *“for, ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”* This means that when the Spirit is with us, we can think like Jesus. We can have compassion like Jesus, and we can love like Jesus. What specifically is the mind of Christ? Paul says in Philippians 2:5-7: *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* The mind of Christ is the humble mind. The mind of Christ is sacrificial love. On the contrary, some Corinthian believers were proud. They were self-righteous. They caused divisions in the church by forming their own groups rather than humbly pray and cowork together. Paul told them to know the mind of Christ by submitting to the Spirit.

In today’s passage, we learn how important it is for us to be led by the Spirit of God. We live in an information age. There are many intellectual people saying wise things on media. They are persuasive. The problem is that their wisdom cannot save us from our sin and death. We need God’s wisdom taught by the Spirit. May God help us to believe and preach the message of Christ crucified with absolute faith! May the Spirit demonstrate his power in the lives of young people! Let us read the key verses again (4,5). *“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”*