Studies on the Holy Spirit, Lesson 9

THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEALS GOD’S WISDOM TO US

1 Corinthians 2:1–16

Key Verse: 2:10

“…these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”

There’s an entire section in the Bible called “the Wisdom Books”—Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The pursuit of wisdom might be one of the best goals in life. However, many people who think they’re wise are actually proud, and that’s not wisdom. Today’s passage teaches us that as Christians we don’t take credit for our wisdom—our wisdom comes from God. It’s the direct revelation of his Spirit to us. As we think about this Bible passage we want to learn what the main point of God’s wisdom actually is. We want to learn how we can have God’s wisdom, how it affects us, and how God wants us to share his wisdom with others. May God speak to us personally through his words today.

Paul begins this letter by addressing the serious problem of divisions within the church. These divisions happened in Corinth because some people thought they were wiser than others. The city of Corinth was in Greece, and it was largely influenced by Greek culture that valued wisdom. Corinthian people were used to having philosophers visit the city and use impressive rhetoric to share their lofty human wisdom. The Christian community there, with this background, started comparing which leader they should follow. Paul was out to put an end to this. So in chapter 1 he appealed to them to be perfectly united in mind and thought. He also reminded them of the message of the cross, the message that unites all believers. From the beginning, the message of Jesus dying on a cross has seemed like foolishness to highly educated people. But Paul says it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Paul proclaimed this message “not with wisdom and eloquence.” He also reminded the believers in Corinth of their humble backgrounds, so that they would stop trying to boast about themselves.

Now in 2:1–5 Paul describes how he himself had originally shared this gospel message. He didn’t come with eloquence or human wisdom. He resolved to know nothing while he was with them except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He came to them in weakness with great fear and trembling. His message and preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power. He did that intentionally, so that their faith would not rest on the human wisdom of Paul, but on God’s power. This tells us a paradoxical truth. It’s when we’re the weakest, with fear and trembling before the living God, with very little knowledge, power or experience, that we’ll depend on the Holy Spirit, and that’s when the Holy Spirit will work most powerfully through us.

Look at verse 6a. “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature…” Paul didn’t try to share God’s wisdom with people outside the community of faith. But he did speak a message of wisdom among the mature. The “mature” didn’t mean the elderly; it meant those who had personally received the message of the cross. To them Paul did speak a message of wisdom. Look at verse 6b. “…but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” Paul didn’t try to share worldly or political wisdom with believers. But he did share a wisdom with them. Read verse 7. God’s wisdom is a mystery that no intelligent, educated or wise human being could ever figure out. It’s a mysterious wisdom that God destined for our glory before time began. That is such an incredible statement. Those who receive Jesus on the cross as their personal Savior receive a mysterious wisdom far superior to even the highest human wisdom the world has ever known.

What is this mystery? Colossians 1:26–27 says it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Though we were once terrible sinners, when we repent and put our trust in Jesus, Jesus comes to dwell within us through the Holy Spirit. He said in John 14:23, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” In light of this verse, it’s actually Christ the Son, God the Father and the Holy Spirit all three dwelling within us, who become our source of God’s wisdom. Paul explains it here in 1 Corinthians 1:30: “It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” Simply speaking, Christ within us is our wisdom from God.

There’s another aspect to God’s wisdom. Read verses 9–10a. It says, “the things God has prepared for those who love him.” What has God prepared for us? Jesus said in Matthew 25:34, “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’” God has prepared a kingdom for us. This, too, is God’s wisdom. When we realize that God really has prepared his glorious kingdom for us, even if we’re humanly poor we feel like the richest person in the world. With the hope of God’s kingdom in our hearts, we have the wisdom to value the right things. We have the wisdom to see this world for what it really is—transitory and fading away. We have the wisdom to know what life really is and what it really should be all about. When we chase after the things of this world, we become like fools. But when we put our hope in God’s kingdom and live our lives with this as our focus, we become truly wise people. Verse 10a says, “…these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.” This tells us that it’s only by the Holy Spirit that we realize the hope of God’s kingdom is not a myth but a reality. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:17–18, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people…” It’s this spiritual enlightenment through the Holy Spirit about God’s great hope for us that makes us spiritually mature (c.f. 3:1).

Let’s read verse 10b. This seems really intense, and a bit scary. Why does the Spirit search all things? It’s because he’s the Spirit of truth. He wants to know the truth about all things. He especially searches our minds and hearts to know what’s really there, what our real motives are. He also helps us search into the deep meanings of the Scriptures, and he shows us how they apply to our lives. Finally, the Spirit helps us know the deep things of God. This seems to mean to know the deep heart and mind of God himself. This, in essence, is God’s wisdom. How can the Spirit reveal the deep things of God to us? In verse 11 Paul mentions the analogy of a person’s spirit that alone knows the person’s secret thoughts. In the same way, God’s Spirit knows very well God’s thoughts and God’s mind. Why does God give us his Spirit? Read verse 12. Mainly, the Spirit reveals to us what God has freely given us. This seems to mean most of all God’s free grace to us through his Son Jesus. We may not know many other deep or mysterious things, but when we really know God’s free grace to us in Jesus, then we really are full of God’s wisdom.

God gives us his Spirit and reveals what he has prepared for us and what he has freely given us not just so that we would personally enjoy them, but also so that we would share them and explain these things to others. Let’s read verse 13. This verse is a great comfort to those trying to share their faith and the meaning of the Bible to others. Of course we need to study the Bible carefully to understand the Christian faith. But ultimately, we can’t depend on our feeble human intellect. We need the Holy Spirit’s help to understand, speak and share what we believe. We don’t have to worry too much about what we’ll say to others who have questions (Lk12:11–12). Instead, our main job is to be connected with the Holy Spirit and to keep in step with the Spirit, depending not on ourselves but humbly on him, so that he may lead us what to say and when to say it. In this way, the Holy Spirit helps us to share God’s wisdom with others.

Paul says in verse 13b, “…explaining spiritual realities in Spirit-taught words.” This seems to be the substance of sharing God’s wisdom. God’s wisdom is different from human wisdom. Human wisdom depends on a high level of academic discipline, including logic, persuasion, an extensive vocabulary and mastery of a wide body of knowledge and information. But God’s wisdom depends only on the Holy Spirit. And God’s wisdom is not so much to explain the realities of the physical, material world, but to explain spiritual realities. What are these “spiritual realities”? They are the reality of God, the reality of his love for us and of what he is doing in our world, the reality of sin and it’s consequences, the reality of God’s judgment for those who refuse to repent, the reality of eternal punishment, the reality of Satan and evil spirits, the reality of God’s presence, and the reality of God’s glorious eternal kingdom. In Western society people have ignored spiritual realities for a long time. What they see as real are physical realities—what their faces and bodies look like, their material possessions, etc. These things seem most important. But people who are rich and who look gorgeous outwardly can be spiritually very sick. We need the Holy Spirit to have the wisdom to see through appearances. We also need the Holy Spirit to have the wisdom to know what words to say to help people spiritually.

Even if we explain spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words, there is no guarantee people will accept what we’re saying. Read verse 14. People without the Spirit tend to be hostile toward spiritual teaching. They can’t understand it, they reject it and consider it foolishness. We shouldn’t be surprised when that happens. Paul also tells us about the privilege of the person with the Spirit. Read verse 15. Here the word “judgment” is better translated as “evaluation” or “discernment.” The person with the Spirit is not judgmental toward everyone, but does have keen spiritual discernment about people and about all kinds of things. And this person with the Spirit is not subject to merely human judgments. It reminds us of Jesus. He had the keenest spiritual discernment about all things. And yet his own people judged him based on his human background. Still, he was not really subject to their judgment—it didn’t define him. The same was true for Paul. When he was full of God’s Spirit, he had keen discernment about all things. But people said of him, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing” (2Co10:10). In light of this, we should be careful not to pass judgment on those who have the Spirit.

So what’s the ultimate goal of having God’s wisdom through the Spirit? Read verse 16. We come to know the mind of the Lord, the mind of Christ, through the Spirit. The mind of Christ is so deep it’s hard even to try to put into words. But the main components of the mind of Christ are his great humility, and his great love. When we have his mind, we can have spiritual unity. To have his mind is what spiritual maturity really is. There is no better wisdom.

In light of this study, may God help us learn how to depend on the Holy Spirit for wisdom. Through the Spirit may God help us to know his amazing grace and the glorious hope of his kingdom. Through the Spirit may God help us share his wisdom with others. Through the Spirit may God especially help us grow in the mind of Christ.