

# God's 'Secret' Wisdom

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, Andy Gemmel is continuing his study this evening in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and we're going to read from there now in the Bibles, 1 Corinthians chapter 2, beginning at verse 6, page 952, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

We're reading through to the first few verses of chapter 3, and perhaps I'll begin reading at the beginning of chapter 2. 1 Corinthians chapter 2, at verse 1.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Yet among the mature, we do impart wisdom, although it's not a wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away, but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

[ 1 : 26 ] None of the rulers of this age understand this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him, 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.

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 followed to him. And he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

[ 2 : 42 ] 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. But our brothers could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now, you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving only in a human way?

But when one says, I follow Paul, and another, I follow Paulus, are you not being merely human? Amen. Amen.

And may God bless to us. This is word. As you're turning to 1 Corinthians, let me pray.

[ 3 : 46 ] Gracious God, we acknowledge that your gospel does make the simple wise.

And we pray that you would, hearing your word this evening, make our minds, our beings new, and your word our guide to heaven.

Hear us, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me tell you about this evening.

This is a sermon with a long introduction. It is important to say that, because 10 to 12 minutes in, you will think we haven't done much yet.

How long are we going to be here? Let me assure you, that it is a long introduction, but it speeds up rapidly, when we get going. It's a bit like a roller coaster.

[ 4 : 51 ] I don't know if you're a roller coaster sort of person. I'm not really a roller coaster sort of person, but I did recently find myself on a roller coaster. And if you've been on a roller coaster recently, you'll remember how it goes.

You get winched up to the top, and the winching up to the top is kind of slow. And it goes, as you get to the top, and it's slow, and you think that nothing's going to happen, and then all hell breaks loose as you descend.

Well, let me say it's a bit like that this evening in this sermon. It is going to be slow to start with, but when we get to the top, it is going to happen quickly, so do not tune out on the way up, as though it's going to be a comfy ride, and you can snooze off with impunity.

Let's start climbing to the top of the hill. Here is a little piece of gobbledygook. You'll need to concentrate for 30 seconds to try and get your head around it.

For the purpose of making a declaration under this subdivision, the commissioner may, A, treat a particular event that actually happened as not having happened, and B, treat a particular event that did not actually happen as having happened, and if appropriate, treat the event as, one, having happened at a particular time, and two, having involved particular action by a particular entity, and C, treat a particular event that actually happened as, one, having happened at a time different from the time that it actually happened, or two, having involved particular action by a particular entity, whether or not the action actually involved any action by that entity.

[ 6 : 42 ] Now, you understand that? Well, that comes to us courtesy of the Australian Taxation Office, and before you think, well, what else would one expect from a tax office, the truth is that words cannot be understood unless we know what they belong to.

They simply make no sense at all. If you don't know what's happening in a piece of writing, it's ever so difficult to work out what the detail means. I think this evening's passage is very like that.

You read it through, on its own, just as we did, and you think, what on earth is that talking about?

You read verse 7, where it mentions secret and hidden wisdom, and you think, well, if there's a secret in there, it certainly remains hidden to me.

The truth is that this is a marvelously reassuring part of the Bible. If you are the sort of person who wonders ever if you, as someone who trusts in Jesus, has the real thing or not, this is a wonderfully reassuring passage.

If you're the sort of person who looks at what other people say and say they have and seem to have and feel in comparison woefully inferior as a Christian, weak, powerless, not very spiritual, you will find this a wonderfully reassuring passage.

[ 8 : 23 ] What's going on here? Well, the way to ask, the way to find out is to look at where it belongs. What's going on in this letter? We're climbing to the top of the roller coaster.

This is a letter to the church in Corinth, a church started by the Apostle Paul. He was there for a couple of years. It's three years since he had to leave. And back in Corinth, some are no longer sure that when he visited them, he gave them the proper gospel package.

It looked okay at the time, but they look back on his visit now at what he said and at the way he said it and at the way he did things and they're no longer sure at all that that was the spiritual thing to say or the spiritual way to do things.

It just doesn't look special enough. What is at stake in chapters 2 and 3 and 4 of this letter is Paul and his message in the eyes of the Corinthian church.

Let me show you that that's the case. Chapter 2, verse 1. Here, he talks about his first visit to Corinth back then about five years ago.

[ 9 : 39 ] I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. When I visited you, I was not full of the sort of wisdom that you're usually impressed by.

Look at chapter 2, verse 6. Yet, among the mature, we do impart wisdom, although not a wisdom of this age. There is a wise message, but it's a different kind of wise.

And verse 7, we impart it. We speak that wise message. We came, we spoke to you, we didn't speak worldly wisdom, but we really did give you wisdom.

Now, the key to understanding our passage today is the small word, we. It runs all the way through this passage. And you wouldn't think the word we was a very important word.

It's just one more than I, after all. But in this passage, the word we is a very important word indeed. When Paul uses the word we in this passage, he does not mean Christians in general, we

Christians.

[10:56] I think he means me as an apostle and the other messengers who brought the apostles' message to you. Because all the way through this section, there is a constant contrast, either between me and you, or between we and you.

Look at 2.1 again. I came to you with a message. Look at 2.13. We impart this wisdom, this wise message, in words.

chapter 3, verse 1. Back then, I could not speak to you as though you were spiritual. Chapter 4, verse 1.

This is how you should regard us. And who is the us here? Well, it's not we Christians. It's chapter 3, me and Apollos. That's what the argument's been about.

He, Paul, and one of the other messengers. Chapter 4, verse 9. I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all.

[12:15] And then when you get into verse 10, he contrasts the us with you. We and you, we and you, all the way through that section. In other words, when we meet the words I and we and us in this part of the letter, it's referring to the people who brought the message of Jesus to the church in Corinth.

Paul and other messengers who brought the apostolic message. Now, it is a great help to understand this. It runs all the way through chapter 1 to 4. The we is the messengers, the authentic messengers.

And the you is the Corinthian church to whom the message came. Why is that important to understand? The Corinthians came to know God through Paul's message.

That's what kicked everything off for them spiritually. Since then, some of them have changed their opinion about him. They've had visits from other messengers.

Apollos, Kephas, the apostle Peter, and some of the Corinthians think that Apollos and Kephas look more spiritual than Paul.

[13:31] Look at chapter 3 verse 4. The end of our reading today, when one says, I follow Paul and another, I follow Apollos, you're being merely human.

They've got their favorites. Also, not only have they had the visitors from outside, some home grown talent is beginning to emerge.

Look at chapter 3 verse 10. Again, Paul is talking about his first encounter with them. According to the grace of God given me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation.

And someone else is building on it now. Let each one take care how he builds. No names mentioned here, but Paul is not confident about who is doing the building in Corinth now.

No doubt they look wise and impressive. Here's the issue. Many of the Corinthians think they've moved on from Paul and his message and his way of doing things.

[14:44] That they've grown up spiritually and rather left home. And the language of that understanding is all the way through today's passage. All the way through.

They think they've moved from infancy to adulthood, from childishness to maturity, from unspiritual to spiritual, from ignorance to knowledge, from folly to wisdom, from superficiality to depth, from worldliness to glory.

Hidden secrets have been uncovered for them since Paul left. Once they liked baby food, now they like solid food. They're no longer milk people, they're meat people.

That is how they look at the period since Paul's visit. And they see these different teachers that they might listen to as marking steps away from Paul's way of doing things.

Apollos, Kephas, the unnamed homeboys, some like that one, some like that one, some like that one, some like that one. All the way through chapter two, Paul talks not about that one and that one and that one and that one, but we.

[16:04] He pulls them all together, except he's not sure about the homeboys. We get on to them in chapter three. That's why the we language is so prominent in chapter two.

He's bringing together under one umbrella all the messengers who've come to Corinth with the real gospel message. They're all the same. Let me sum up then.

Here we're getting to the top of the rollercoaster. Prepare for the downslope. Since Paul's visit, some in Corinth think that they've grown up spiritually. Of course, they argue about who has and hasn't grown up, who is and isn't properly spiritual, and they argue which of their visiting teachers is the model to follow for grown ups.

But significantly, they look back on Paul's visit, and they don't think much of it, or of him. They think of him as foolish in comparison with their new found wisdom, a milkman rather than a meatman, a wet nurse rather than a bloke with a great big barbecue in his back garden.

The food he gave them, well, it was okay, but it wasn't man food. And what Paul does in this passage is to use all their language about how they think they've grown up and turn it on its head.

[17:31] Wise are you? No, no, we are the wise. Mature? Well, there certainly are mature people out there, but not you. You inside the deep things of God's mind now?

No, says Paul, we have the mind of Christ, not you. Grown ups, somebody pass me the breast milk. That's where we're at spiritually.

We're at the top of the slope, a lengthy introduction, but I hope it will get us inside this passage and set us on the right trajectory. Why are we trying to climb inside this passage?

I mean, think of how stupid that looks at one level. What a strange thing to do. We, in the 21st century, trying to get inside the situation of a church two millennia ago.

Why are we doing it? Well, only if we do that will we really understand the force of what God is saying to us. For there is a timeless issue here which we need to understand.

[18:40] It's just as big an issue now as it was back then. We will all meet it. If we're Christian, we will all struggle as a result of it.

And if we get this issue on board, it will be absolutely liberating, confidence-inspiring, and reassuring, here is the issue.

Christians in every age will always tend to think of the gospel message as a basic truth from which you move on to deeper truth.

And Christians in every age will always tend to think that the shape of the Christian life is that you start with basic spirituality and move on to deeper spirituality.

And this passage tells us that that is garbage. When you believe the apostles' gospel about Jesus, you have not basic truth.

[19:49] You have the deep things of God, the whole package, right from day one. And you have to continue in it, not move on beyond it.

And when you start the Christian life, you are not entry-level spirituality, but grown-up spirituality. You might be young in the faith, historically speaking, and sure, there's plenty of understanding to get, but you've got the whole deal from the beginning onwards, and you have to stay in it, rather than moving on from it.

You do not move on from what you get at the beginning. You continue it. And let me say, just as in their age, so in ours, loads of people will tell you that that is not the way things are.

If you've not met that problem yet in life, you'll meet it. The pressure to go for something more spiritual looking than trusting in Jesus and believing Paul's gospel.

You'll meet it repeatedly. You'll find yourself repeatedly in the Christian life under pressure to move on from the gospel. And it's not wisdom, says Paul, it is folly to make that move.

[21:08] Don't swallow it. It's a liberating idea. If you've trusted Jesus, you've got the whole package. Keep trusting him and hang in for his appearing.

Now, we're at the top of the roller coaster now. We are starting the descent. It is going to get quicker. Hang on. First heading. I'm going to divide this into three headings basically.

First, true wisdom from God does not look impressive now. True wisdom from God does not look impressive now.

Verse six. Yet, among the mature, we do impart wisdom. Though it's not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away.

Wisdom, maturity, the Corinthian ears instantly prick up. These are words they like. Immediately, Paul qualifies this statement.

[22:12] Not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away. The wisdom the mature recognize is not a worldly looking wisdom.

It doesn't look impressively wise. In fact, he says, verse seven, the true wisdom we impart has long been kept hidden. We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

Again, there are words here that are right up the Corinthian street. He talks about secrets and the Corinthians like secret stuff, like knowing stuff that other people don't know.

That's what they think they have in their new wisdom, secret stuff that no one else knows. Paul is talking here not about some inaccessible truth available only to Corinthians. he's talking about something that he imparts in the gospel. It's not a secret in the sense that you have to be clever to grasp it.

[ 23 : 20 ] It's a secret in the sense that until recently, it's been hidden in the counsel of God and it's only been made available recently. Even now, says Paul, it doesn't look that impressive.

The Corinthians think there is a secret wisdom that only they know. Paul says, no, the real secret stuff, only God knows, and now he's made it known to all in the gospel.

And if all don't get it, it's not because it's not there to see, it's because it's unexpected, it's not like human wisdom. True wisdom from God does not look impressive.

He also talks, verse 7, about glory, it's for our glory. Again, glory is a very Corinthian sort of word, it's the kind of word they like.

They like to think that since Paul left them, their lives have become more glorious, rich, regal. Paul says, no, the results of this wisdom don't yet look impressive.

[ 24 : 21 ] There is amazing glory to come, but it can't be seen yet. Point number one, true wisdom from God does not look impressive. I wonder if you believe that, or if you think that if you were party to real wisdom from God, it would look splendid and impressive.

Well, Paul gives two pieces of evidence to support his claim. First, the crucifixion shows that God's way of doing things is not impressive.

Verse 8, none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. glory. What more glorious thing could happen? What more glorious thing could happen than the God of glory coming into the world?

But that glory was unperceived. When Paul talks here about the rulers of this age, I think he means spiritual and human rulers. If the powers that be had recognized that Jesus was really the Lord of glory, coming to conquer evil, coming to bring salvation and judgment, well, they'd never have crucified him.

Crucifixion looks like victory for the powers of evil, but actually it's played right into God's hands. Jesus did not look glorious.

[ 25 : 48 ] He was crucified, and his glory has not been revealed for all to see. You cannot wake up tomorrow morning. It doesn't matter how good a mood you're in. You cannot wake up tomorrow morning and open the curtains and say, aha, the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, there he is.

That is, unless it's the last day tomorrow morning. You cannot perceive that with your eyes. It doesn't look glorious. He doesn't look now like the glorious victor over evil.

Does he look around? Where is he? Can you see him? Paul's point is, the whole crucifixion thing shows that God's way of doing things does not look impressive.

Second evidence is that the scriptures agree, verse 9, but as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him, these things God has revealed to us.

The passage being quoted here is probably Isaiah 64, and the point that seems to be being made both back there and here, is that what God has got in mind in his great plan cannot be worked out in advance by human eyes looking at it, or ears hearing it's coming, or imagination dreaming it up.

[ 27 : 08 ] You cannot perceive what God is doing with the organs of human sense or imagination. crucifixion. That is true of what God has done through the crucifixion in the past.

No one saw it coming, and it's true of what's coming in the future. God's going to bring great glory for his people in the future that's unimaginable at the moment.

I asked you to do this a couple of weeks ago. Do it again. Look around. Look around. Do these look like the glorious ones? Absolutely not. They just look like other people.

God's wisdom and God's glory are not humanly perceivable, but look at verse 10. Keywords. God has revealed by his spirit keywords to us.

And who's the us? Paul and the apostolic messengers. true wisdom from God does not look impressive.

[ 28 : 18 ] The cross shows it. Scripture says so. Why is Paul saying this? Because the Corinthians have heard his message in comparison with what they've heard more recently.

They think his message now sounds pretty stupid and that his ministry looks pretty rubbish. And they think they have acquired now something more wise and more glorious.

Because it sounds wiser and it looks more glorious. Let me observe that this is a timeless reality. There are many things in our present age that claim to be Christian and yet claim to be more spiritual sounding and more spiritual looking than Paul's message. That was true back then. It is true now and it's not the case. True wisdom from God does not in the coming of Jesus in the ministry of Paul or in our own age look wise and powerful. It doesn't. That's big point number one. Big point number two. True wisdom from God comes through Paul's gospel.

[ 29 : 43 ] The big point that Paul is going to make in the rest of this section through chapter two is that our gospel my gospel and those are the other messengers unimpressive as it looks actually reveals the very depths of God's character for all to see.

Now we're going to go this is the steep part of the rollercoaster curve. Let me get you to look at verse nine and I want you to notice the similarity between verses nine and ten and verse sixteen. verse nine what no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him these things these unimaginable unseen things God has revealed to us through the spirit.

Look at how similar verse sixteen is. Who has understood the mind of the Lord as to instruct him but we have the mind of Christ.

Both of these sections beginning and end start with human beings can't get something but God has revealed something and he's revealed something to verse ten us to verse sixteen we namely Paul and the apostles.

[ 31 : 06 ] We have the mind of Christ says Paul which is not what the Corinthians thought about him. The Corinthians didn't think he had the whole package.

Didn't think he was particularly spiritual. Now in between verses nine and ten and verse sixteen the steep part of the curve he talks about the fact that only by the work of the spirit can God be made known and the work of the spirit has worked to produce the apostles message.

That's basically the movement on this steep part. Let me take it in four steps. Step one the spirit searches the depths of God verse ten the spirit searches everything even the depths of God.

Who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person which is in him? In other words you can't know a person unless they tell you their thoughts. Step two we apostles have received that spirit verse twelve we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit who's from God that we might understand the things freely given.

Here's step two we apostles have received this spirit step three the spirit has taught us verse twelve and step four we speak the spirit's words.

[ 32 : 42 ] Let's run through that again. Only a person's spirit can show what they're really like. We have received God's spirit God's spirit has instructed us and we are passing on the message of God's spirit to you.

Straight line from God himself to the Corinthians via Paul and his message. That is the root from God to the Corinthians Paul and his message.

Look at verse 14. The natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God for their folly to him and he's not able to understand them because they're spiritually discerned.

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.

I think verse 14 can only mean that in the Corinthian eyes Paul was judged as being unspiritual worldly looking and undiscerning.

[ 33 : 56 ] On the contrary says Paul the mark of the worldly man the unspiritual man is verse 14 he thinks our gospel is a stupid thing.

The spiritual man talking about himself here he's got all the information he knows what's going on in the world he knows what God is doing he does not feel judged by the Corinthians the wisdom from God doesn't look impressive that's point number one the wisdom of God has come to Colin through Paul's gospel that's point number two question and here's point number three who is the wise person who is the wise person well of course the Corinthians think that they are the wise people could could have have been so self deceived they were quite convinced that the teachers they were listening to now were much more spiritual quite convinced that they were wise so convinced that they wanted to move on from

Paul self deception is at the heart of this letter and one of the key things is that the Corinthians allowed themselves to be impressed by big talkers folks don't be impressed by big talkers by people who offer you something bigger and better and fatter and richer now than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and looking forward eagerly to his coming a reassuring principle who is the spiritual person someone who believes Paul's gospel two things we find it very hard to believe that the apostle Paul could have been viewed as being unspiritual and that the Corinthians could have been so self deceived but we often view Paul as unspiritual in this age and we're often deceived about the nature of real spirituality let's pray together what the

[ 45 : 12 ] Corinthians received from Paul came straight from the depths of God by the spirit to him to them through his weak looking message our gracious God we pray that you would open our eyes to the way things really are in this age you have said that you overturn the wisdom of the wise the power of this present age the apostle states all the way through these chapters that you have said that in the scriptures and you've done it that way in the cross of Jesus the most powerful and most weak looking thing in this present age please help us to believe that this is the way things are help us to believe what the scripture says that the message about the death of

Jesus weak as it looks is the spiritual place to be help us to believe that there is a great day coming when the Lord Jesus will be revealed and that we trusting in that gospel message can be sustained guiltless in that day perfected transformed everything overturned please deliver us from being deceived please keep us in this confidence for we ask it in Jesus name Amen God, notomo to who is one thing B