

A Spiritual Church

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[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk. I'm Josh Johnston. I'm a minister and training here at the Tron Church. And this week together we're going to be looking at a section of 1 Corinthians chapter 2. So please do turn that up in your Bibles. We're going to be looking at verses 6 to 16. If you're using a church visitor's Bible, that's on page 953.

While you turn that up, let me pray. Father, we thank you that you have revealed to us this your word, that we might know you, that we might have the real hope that there is in the cross of our Lord Jesus. So this lunchtime we pray that you would, by your spirit, open our eyes to see the truth that is in this your word. Help us to respond rightly, and that as we go back into the rest of our weeks, and whatever it is we're doing, that we would do so with great confidence in the gospel of the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen. Let's read together.

1 Corinthians 2 verses 6 to 16. Yet among the mature, we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of 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. None of the rulers of this age understood 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 folly to him, and he is not able to understand them, because they are 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. What makes someone spiritual?

[3 : 0 5] I was reading an article in which someone suggested that there are 12 signs of a truly spiritual person. Here's a pick of some of the best ones. You gaze at the stars. You feel serenity in nature.

You follow your guided intuition. You're appreciative of the smallest bug to the largest animal. Travel is appealing. And you have a heart for humor.

I think not. Maybe you've heard of some of the phrases that get thrown around in Christian circles about what it is to be spiritual. Well, to be a proper Christian, you must be baptized in the right way or be practicing supernatural gifts or spend half of every day praying and reading God's Word.

Maybe you've been told that the God you believe in is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Bible. So you're not really a spiritual person. Or you've been told that your church is a spiritually dead church because you don't speak in tongues or because physical healing doesn't happen.

When all of this is going on around us, we can easily begin to think that we're not really spiritual. Maybe we're not even real Christians. The Corinthians misunderstood this.

[4 : 26] Paul was writing to a church that thought of two levels of Christians, the spiritual and the unspiritual. Paul knew that this notion of some Christians being spiritual and others not being spiritual undermined the very heart of the gospel.

There is no such dividing line in the church. The church or the spiritual. The dividing line is around it, not through it.

So Paul preached a gospel that was simply Christ crucified. His gospel wasn't flashy. It wasn't impressive. He was so determined to get this across that even how he taught it lacked eloquence.

He didn't want to sway people by how he taught. And in 2-3, we see that he was even with them in weakness, fear and much trembling.

They could see that he wasn't anything particularly special. But Paul wanted them to know that his message was special. Paul's gospel is the only real gospel.

[5 : 28] It's understandable that people might have looked at Paul's ministry and thought, he can't be very spiritual. How could a special and spiritual person have so many scars on them?

How could they have so little wealth? How could they be so bland and uninteresting? Well, Paul answers these questions and the answers all come back again to his gospel, which exalts and extols the cross.

Firstly, he says in verses 6-10, Christ crucified is the litmus test for having the spirit. Christ crucified is the litmus test for having the spirit.

In science at school, I'm sure some of you would have used blue litmus paper at some point to determine whether a liquid was acidic. It's a test that indicates decisively what something is.

And Paul tells the Corinthians that the real test of having the spirit is what you do with the message of Christ crucified. The person who is spiritual believes the foolish-looking message about Jesus on the cross.

[6 : 38] They see that it is the true message given by the spirit. They know it's true wisdom. Look at verse 6. Yet among the mature, we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, because it doesn't look like wisdom.

In fact, to most people, it looks foolish. Paul says that it is the mature who see the wisdom in what Paul says. It's a hidden and a secret wisdom that Paul preaches.

It's not what the leading academics of our day spend their hours writing about. It's not the wisdom that the rulers of this world use to govern. It is not a wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this age.

They're doomed to pass away, but Paul's ministry is wise and lasts for eternity. The mature are those who are wise enough to submit to the gospel, those who cling on to the cross as their only hope, no matter how much it humbles them.

Whilst Paul's message looks foolish, whilst the cross of Jesus looks foolish, whilst the church looks foolish, it is Christians and the church who are truly wise.

[7 : 55] No amount of PhDs or degrees or titles make anyone who rejects Jesus wiser than a Christian with no education at all. In a worldly sense, if you're the least impressive person when it comes to wisdom and education, but you trust Jesus, then you're truly wise.

You believe a timeless and unchanging truth because, verse 7, Paul and the apostles impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

Whilst the gospel declares that we have nothing impressive about us, it also acts for our glory. That's how you know you're wise. Because a Christian looks at the world and sees that in the end, the only thing that will matter, is it embracing the cross?

Or is it scorning it? Or is it listing off reasons we feel we need? The decisive test about whether you're a spirit or not is when looking at the cross, prepared for those who love him.

Even if you haven't seen it or heard it or imagine it, you hear the gospel and think, yes! Even the wise and powerful of Jesus' day didn't understand Jesus' rescue mission.

[9 : 11] They saw him in the flesh, they heard what he did, they saw his miracles, heard his teaching, and they still didn't believe it. And so, verse 8, they killed him.

The church that is spiritual is the church that is not only prepared to look weak and foolish, but expects to. The church that is spiritual doesn't think of anything else as spiritual apart from the good news of the gospel at work and its people.

Have you been told something to the effect that you're not really a good Christian because you're not very spiritual? Do you love and cling to the cross of Jesus? Because if you do, then you are truly spiritual and you have the Spirit.

Because as Paul goes on to point out in verses 10 to 14, as we follow the apostles' gospel, we follow the Spirit. If you understand Paul's gospel in a way that makes you follow it and submit to it, then Paul says that you are clearly a spiritual person.

Because, verse 10, it is the Spirit who searches everything. It is he who understands the depths of God. And look at verse 11. Who else could possibly understand on their own?

[10 : 30] For who knows a person's thoughts except the Spirit of that person which is in him? And again, verse 10. These things have been revealed to us, the apostles, through the Spirit.

The Corinthians cherish special speech and special wisdom. They may even claim to have insight into the secrets of God. But it's all to look superior as Christians.

That's at the heart of Paul's rebuke. It is ridiculous to think we can be superior Christians. It's absurd. Because what makes us Christians is nothing that we can claim.

As Paul keeps repeating, it is the cross of Christ and that only which makes anyone spiritual or not. Paul clarifies for us what the Spirit does and how he makes people spiritual.

It is not by giving them special gifts that set them apart as spiritual. It is not through giving special wisdom that can be lorded over others.

[11 : 36] No. Paul in these four verses mentions the Spirit or spiritual things at least ten times. And what is at the heart of true spirituality? It is this.

The wisdom of God known only by the Spirit revealed to the apostles. The gospel that we have in the Bible given by the Spirit.

And as those words are preached, the Spirit makes them come to life. In short, the Spirit gave the gospel to Paul and the apostles. That is the only message that is spiritual.

So as we stick to the biblical gospel, we're enjoying the Spirit speaking to us. What does the Spirit do for believers? He reveals the gospel to the apostles that they can understand it.

And through them, the Spirit interprets it for us so that we can understand and know and love Jesus and all that he's done for us on the cross. However, there is another Spirit.

[12 : 42] And throughout these verses, the Spirit of God is contrasted with the Spirit of the world. Verse 12. The gospel of Christ crucified is given through the Spirit of God, not the Spirit of the world.

That's why Paul can preach it with words that are not eloquent or flash or impressive. He can do it the way he does it because it is the words of the Spirit of God, not his feeble words.

The Spirit of the world relies on human wisdom, verse 13, on impressiveness. But the gospel Paul teaches is taught by the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of the world encourages things that undermine the gospel. The Spirit of the world loves churches to be filled with people who think that they are wise and they are spiritual. People who think that they're better than the average Christian.

The Spirit of the world will say things that are not true, that are not wise, and that are not powerful in any real way. The Spirit of the world builds churches that are smug and rely on shoes of strength and impressiveness.

[13 : 53] Churches that rely on gifts that make man look good. But the true Spirit of God speaks through the gospel to believers, to you and me.

We have insight into the wisdom of God through the Spirit in the gospel. spiritual people are people who believe the gospel because that's what's been revealed by the Spirit.

I have at various times been made to feel like a fake Christian. Do you know the feeling? I've been made to think that I'm missing out on what it is to be really a Christian.

I'm sure some of you know what I'm talking about. And it comes down to what people believe about the Spirit. Well, Paul wants to encourage us that when we feel like that, we need to remember those feelings are caused by the Spirit of this world.

Because when we think that we've been sold a gospel that has people who are spiritual Christians and people who are unspiritual Christians, Paul tells us clearly that the Spirit's work in the life of a believer is to make clear the apostles' message, the Bible.

[15 : 13] Because the Spirit has revealed it to them. And so the Spirit's work in your life is to point you to what Christ has done on the cross. So if you believe and trust Jesus, knowing that His cross is the only hope that you have, then you are as spiritual as you could possibly ever be.

because verses 14 to 16, all believers depend completely on the Spirit. When someone has said to you that you aren't a Christian because you haven't had some grand spiritual experience, verse 14 is your comfort.

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.

On our own, we would not accept the Gospel. That is the bare fact of it. So if we do, the Spirit has been working.

The brightest person that has ever existed will not arrive at the Gospel on their own because that is not what the Spirit of the world speaks of. It is not what the natural person understands.

[16 : 28] In fact, the cross is foolish to him. It can only be understood through the Spirit of God. That is why the spiritual person, verse 15, can judge or discern all of the things of God.

If you are a Christian, you have the key to understanding the things that matter in this world. You have the Spirit guiding you to understand the Gospel. And so the answer to the question in verse 16, for who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?

It is not no one as we might expect. The answer is, we have the mind of Christ. How do we have it? We have it because of the Spirit through the apostles.

Paul's message had gone out of fashion in Corinth. He wasn't impressive. Other preachers had better turns of phrase. Other preachers had better illustrations. Other preachers had more engaging styles.

He was probably the equivalent of a dull Northern Irish preacher. Other preachers maybe had lives that looked more victorious, more glorious than Paul's.

[17 : 45] He suffered. He was weak. He was afraid. There were factions in the church. Love had left. It was a church that was divided. Paul knew the only remedy to such things is his silly-looking gospel.

But look at what he says at the end of verse 15. The spiritual person is himself to be judged by no one. If we look at other Christians and think they're inferior, if as a church we succumb to the most troubling Corinthian traits, then we prove that we lack true wisdom.

If I were to look at a Christian and think of myself as superior, I'd prove myself to lack true wisdom. Christians cannot be judged by the spirit of the world because the world is foolish to anything spiritual.

That's how the Corinthians were acting. Paul in chapter 3 says he cannot address them as spiritual people because, 3-3, they are still of the flesh.

For whilst there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? A Christian has nothing to be jealous about.

[19 : 03] Someone who understands and delights in the cross of Jesus is a spiritual giant that cannot be judged to be inferior by anyone. Paul says, if you trust in the cross of Jesus, then you know the mind of Christ and you are spiritual.

Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. The simple answer to the question, who is spiritual is anyone who has had their eyes opened by God's Spirit to believe in the cross of Jesus, to believe the apostles' gospel.

So here are three implications from all of this for any church. One, as a church, we must expect to be looked at as silly. No matter how wealthy we are as a church, no matter how many buildings and gospel plants we have, no matter how many people attend each service, none of that will mean the world will be impressed by us.

A truly impressive church is a church that by the Spirit is humbly united around the hope of Christ's cross, the gospel of the apostles.

second, we cannot separate the Word and the Spirit. We do our best here to be a church that loves the Bible because the Spirit has revealed the mind of God in it.

[20 : 32] If we are going to be a church that loves God's Word, then we must be a church that humbly relies on God's Spirit to teach us it and by it lead us in God's way.

So if we want to be a spiritual church, we must be a church that takes God's Word seriously. Third, we must be a church that doggedly, constantly, and joyfully sticks to Christ crucified.

The Bible speaks about a lot of things. We must teach and study and speak about them all, but we must not be drawn away from its central message. No matter how unpopular it is, no matter how much it costs us in the eyes of the world, the cross is everything because at the cross Jesus defeated the power of darkness and evil in the world.

At the cross Jesus achieved forgiveness for his church as he was punished for their sin. At the cross Jesus guaranteed that all that is wrong in the world will be undone.

At the cross Jesus flattened anything that you or I could boast in. If we are a church that sticks to the cross of Christ we will be a church that doesn't have space for people who would belittle other Christians as unspiritual because we'll be a humble church dependent on God's Spirit to keep us on the gospel train.

[22 : 02] Who is a spiritual person? what is a spiritual church? It's a people dependent on God's Spirit through his word to lead us to the cross.

Amen. Amen. Thank you very much, thy Timothy.

Thank you.