**New Life Bible Study – Autumn Term 2023 Session Seven:**

**1 Corinthians 2:10-3:4**

**Title:** **The spiritual person v the natural/carnal person**

**Introduction**

In these verses Paul is continuing along the same line of thought as the previous verses: God’s wisdom prevailing over the world’s wisdom, which has been expressed in the gospel, simply and ultimately Christ crucified. So, although the following verses seem to shift in focus to the Spirit (2:10-16), we can only really understand what Paul is saying here if we keep 1:18 and 1:23 in the forefront of our mind.

More specifically, Paul will expand on how this ‘hidden’ wisdom, or mystery, is revealed (2:10-12) and the differing consequences for those who receive this revelation and those that don’t (2:14-15).

We’ll broadly address three points around this passage:

* How the Spirit reveals
* What the Spirit reveals
* The contrast between those with the Spirit and those without

**The Spirit as ‘Revealer’ – 2:10-13**

Paul now introduces the Spirit as the One who reveals the wisdom of God; a mystery hidden throughout the ages.

How can the Spirit reveal this wisdom?

Paul likens God’s Spirit to the mind of a person: Only the mind of that person can know the deepest secrets they hold, unless they choose to tell someone else. In the same way, only God’s own Spirit can disclose the deep things of God (2:10-11).

Linked to this, Jesus explains to his disciples that the Spirit will be sent *by him, from the Father – ‘the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father’.* (John 15:26). This is the foundation to Paul’s teaching that the Spirit is of God himself and is as closely linked to him as a man is to his own mind.

This is why the Spirit is essential in revealing the mystery of the gospel to church, who will preach it to the world.

[It’s important here to note here that Paul is talking about the people of God and the gospel as a whole, rather than personal revelation. ‘What ***we***have is the not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, so that ***we*** may understand what God has freely given us’ (2:12). It’s not about individual revelation]

What does the Spirit reveal?

**SPOILER ALERT:** we’ve already mentioned it a few times!

The flow of thought in 2:10-13 is as follows:

What we have received is the Spirit of God himself, not the spirit or wisdom of this world (2:11-12)

This Spirit has led us to understand what God has freely given us (2:12)

What he has freely given us is what Paul [we] speaks, in proclaiming the good news (2:13)

And what does Paul speak (Remember 1:23)? Christ crucified!

**Christ and him crucified** are the ‘spirit-taught words’ which explain ‘spiritual realities’ (2:14).

At the end of Luke’s gospel when Jesus opened the mind of the disciples, so they could understand the scriptures (What a thought!!), what was the ultimate revelation?

*‘This is what is written: the messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations…’* (Luke 24:45-47).

…Or in other words – **CHRIST CRUCIFIED!**

**Remember Bible Study Term 1, lesson 1** - The bible is a book about God’s salvation in Jesus. So, when the resurrected Jesus is summing up all the scriptures, it’s no surprise that he declares that ‘what is written’ is him crucified for our salvation!

Contrasting the person with the Spirit and the person without

In 2:14 Paul tells us that the person without the Spirit can’t understand what comes from God (i.e. the message of Christ crucified) because they don’t accept the Spirit of God.

This might appear to be a very ‘chicken and egg’ scenario at first, but we need to accept a couple of truths here:

1. Without the intervention of God, causing faith to grow in a person, it’s impossible for them to come to a saving knowledge of him. Paul will expand on this later when he explains that the sower (of the gospel message) and the reaper are nothing, because God makes things grow (3:7).

Again, Jesus will say in John 6:44, that no one comes to him unless the Father ‘draws him’.

So, it’s clear that this ‘accepting’ and ‘understanding’ of the truth of God is always dependent on his own power at work in the person. BUT….

1. Our inability to understand the truth of God as a ‘culpable inability’.[[1]](#footnote-1) It’s our sinfulness as humans that means we don’t *want* to hear God’s message of salvation and repent. We therefore close our ears to a message which is well within our grasp, intellectually.

Quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus puts people’s inability to understand his parables down to the fact that their hearts have *become* ‘calloused’ (Matt 13:14-15).

A question to ask ourselves is: At the end of this age, do you think an unrepentant person will be able to say that his or her hardness of heart (leading to an inability to understand the message) was all God’s fault and had nothing to do with them?

**Judging all things – a little warning!**

In 1 Corinthians 2:15, Paul makes the statement that ‘The person with the Spirit makes judgements about **all things**’ without being subject to human judgement.

This verse has probably led to lots of people saying and doing damaging things, with no sense of accountability because “they have the ‘Spirit’ and can’t be judged”! But in the context of this passage we can no longer think this!

* The person with the Spirit can make ‘judgements’ on **all things** because they’ve been in both states – once not having the Spirit (unsaved) and then having him (saved). The judgement isn’t a condescending one but actually a coming to their senses about who the real Judge is. Not human worldly leaders and philosophers, that the Corinthians were in danger of following! [[2]](#footnote-2)

**Infants or adults? – 1 Corinthians 3:1-4**

With all this talk of spirituality, you may have thought Paul would use a very ethereal example to measure the church’s maturity. Instead, he addresses them as ‘worldly’ and unspiritual because there is ‘jealousy’ and ‘quarrelling’ among them. Our spirituality is always shown by our actual behaviour.

This will become the running theme for much of the rest of the letter, with Paul using many earthed and behavioural examples to assess the churches spirituality, including but not limited to:

Sexual immorality– ch.5 and 7

Lawsuits – ch.6

Marriage – ch.7

Treatment of the poor at the Lord’s supper ch.11

This reminds us of the words of Christ that his followers will always be recognised ultimately ‘by their fruit’ (Matt 7:15-20)

**Table discussion**

1. What seem to be the main reasons for hard-heartedness in people receiving and accepting the gospel?
2. Can we do anything in helping people to come to the point where they can receive God’s wisdom (by his Spirit)?
3. What does Paul mean when he calls the Corinthians ‘mere infants in Christ’?
4. What is God saying to you and what are you going to do about it?

Who can you tell about what you’ve learned over the ne

1. D.A Carson, ‘The Cross &Christian Ministry: An exposition of passages from 1 Corinthians’, IVP, 1993, p58 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Carson p.59 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)