

Relying on the Word and the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

October 4th, 2020

1. Focusing on the _____ (2:1-5)

2. Relying on the _____ (2:6-16)

a. To _____ God (2:6-11)

In revealing Himself, God has taken _____ to make Himself _____ to people through general and specific ways. (Psalm 19; Romans 1:18-20)

b. To _____ the Word (2:12-13)

In inspiring the Bible, God worked through the human authors so that they _____ and recorded without error His message to mankind. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

c. To _____ the believer (2:14-16)

By illuminating believers, the Holy Spirit enables God's people to _____ God's Word (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:14-15)

3. Truths that matter

a. Read, study, listen to, memorize, and meditate on God's _____ .

b. _____ for the Holy Spirit to work as you _____ to people about the crucified Christ.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. In what way should the perspective in 2:1-5 inform a church's ministry today? (i.e. how can we focus on Christ crucified in all our ministries? How can we avoid emphasizing "a show" rather than substance?)
2. Review Deuteronomy 8:17-18 and 31:6-8. What do we learn about strength and power in those passages? How is that similar to the emphasis on strength and weakness in 1 Corinthians 1-2?
3. What are some ways we can be tempted to rest our faith on the wisdom of men rather than on the power of God? (2:5)
4. Why must Christians always be careful not to link Christianity with "the wisdom of this age?" (2:6) In addition to our own time and place, how might Christians have been tempted to do that in other times of history? (i.e. Christians in Nazi Germany during WW2, Christians in a communist country, etc.)
5. Have you ever felt like no one really understands you? (2:11) How does Paul compare that to the work of the Holy Spirit?
6. What differences do you notice between the "natural man" and the "spiritual" in 2:14-16?

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Big idea: God's self-revelation is sufficient and powerful to save through the work of the Spirit; our own rhetorical wisdom is not.

God's Word is Enough

Intro:

Helen Keller – At 19 months old Keller contracted a disease that left her both deaf and blind. She describes that as being “at sea in a dense fog.” She was barely able to communicate with some homemade signs and she learned to distinguish people by the vibration of their footsteps, but she was mostly cut off from knowledge about the world. She didn't understand language, or words, or writing. That changed when at 7 years old a young woman named Anne Sullivan came to live with the family to be her teacher. Sullivan would spell out words in Keller's hands. Keller would copy the symbols but didn't get it. She didn't understand that the signs represented letters and the letters represented sounds and combined together formed words that identified objects. She got so frustrated when she was holding a coffee mug in one hand while Sullivan signed “m-u-g” in her other hand that she threw the mug down and broke it. It seemed foolish to her. It made no sense. The breakthrough came a month later when Sullivan held Keller's hand in moving water and signed “water” in her other. Suddenly it clicked and she describes the change like a misty consciousness that lifted as the mystery of language was revealed. She demanded to know the name of every object in her world after that.

How do we know God?

He would be just as mysterious to us as the outside world was to Keller. He's so different than us. So much more complex. There is an intuitive sense for all people that He exists, but a thousand different ideas of what He is like.

We know God because He wants us to know Him. He reached out to us in Jesus and through His Word. The cross communicates and so does God's Spirit-inspired Word.

1. Focusing on the **Crucified Christ** (2:1-5)
 - a. The message (the cross 1:18-25), the recipients (the Corinthians/us 1:26-31), and the messenger (Paul/me 2:1-5) all carry the same point: self-reliance is foolish.
 - i. The message cannot be figured out by human wisdom, it seems foolish.
 - ii. The recipients would not seem wise, mighty, or noble, so they seem to be a foolish choice.
 - iii. The messenger is weak.
 1. What shows up strong in all of this is God.
 - b. Paul wouldn't play their game of chasing powerful teachers with great rhetorical skills to line up under.
 - i. He didn't come with superiority of speech (overpowering oratory) or of wisdom – not human wisdom.
 - ii. “He refused to preach a crucified Savior through his own cool persona.”
 - iii. He came as a witness sharing a testimony – a report of what he had seen and heard about Jesus.
 - iv. Notice in v 2 that this was a determined plan
 1. Seems to imply intentional effort and planning to focus only on Jesus and Him crucified
 2. For 18 months (as we read in Acts 18), he taught them the Word of God.

3. Not that he left all other knowledge aside or only talked about those portions of God's Word that have to do with Jesus' death.
 4. We should see how each portion of scripture – whether OT or NT, poetry, wisdom, prophesy – relates to Jesus.
 5. Additionally, the most important truth that each person must accept is that of Jesus and Him crucified.
 - a. You may learn good tips for marriage, parenting, finances, wisdom in relationships, but we must learn those in the context of following Jesus.
- c. Paul didn't come with an impressive persona.
- i. Weakness probably refers to an observable physical condition.
 1. **Galatians 4:13-14** but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴ and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus *Himself*.
 - ii. Not a polished and powerful speaker
 1. **2 Corinthians 10:10** For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."
 2. Sounds like a bad Yelp review for a church.
 3. Ray Ortlund, Jr. "Rhetoric was the basis of education and credibility in Paul's world. It was the social dividing line between the leisured upper class of smart, cool people and the working lower class of simple, ordinary people... They respected the display of intellectual sophistication and wit. It was how the gears of persuasion were lubricated. Rhetorical polish got a man's name in lights. And the Corinthian church had no problem with it ([2 Cor 11:18-21](#))."
 4. He preached a crucified Christ in a crucified style.
 - iii. It wasn't human power and boldness and courage
 1. **2 Corinthians 4:7** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;
 2. **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.
 - iv. Israel was both encouraged to be strong and courageous AND warned against assuming the strength was their own.
 1. **Deuteronomy 31:6-8** "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."
 2. **Deuteronomy 8:17-18** "Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' ¹⁸ "But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.
 - v. When our weaknesses are evident instead of hidden, people are pointed to the sufficiency and goodness of Christ.

- d. The result of this style, the point of this style, the reason behind this approach was so that their faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but the power of God
 - i. How tenuous it is when our faith rests on people instead of God. What do we do when they fail? What do we do when a big-name pastor, author, evangelist or others closer to home (parents for some, Bible study leaders, fellow students), wander or fall away? Does our faith fail as well? It may, if it rested on them.
 - ii. How exhausting and stressful it is to try to be someone's messiah as well. Rather, the power must be "of God."
 - iii. Strong, solid churches populated by growing, rooted Christians are not formed by following people are a miracle of the Holy Spirit produced in response to the gospel.

2. Relying on the ***Holy Spirit*** (2:6-16)

a. To ***reveal*** God (2:6-11)

- i. We do speak "wisdom" – just not the wisdom of this age.
 - 1. What seems wise and obvious and truthful in each age will vary and change.
 - 2. William Inge - Whoever marries the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next.
 - a. If Christians hitch our wagon to whatever is intellectually fashionable at the time, we will be pulled all around. Sometimes they will be movements that are closer to God's perspective, other times they will be far away. In either case, the gospel becomes obscured, hidden.
 - b. Consider various movements that are part of the "wisdom of this age."
 - i. Phrenology – study of skull shapes (19th century)
 - ii. Enneagram
 - iii. Critical race theory
 - iv. Marxism
 - v. Capitalism
 - vi. Christianity has survived under monarchies, dictatorship, representative democracies, free societies, communism, and more. Certainly, some systems are more closely aligned with Biblical principles and ideals, including people as image bearers of God with inherent value.
- ii. This wisdom comes by God's revelation as He takes initiative to make Himself known through the message of the cross and through the work of the Spirit in the individual heart to respond.
 - 1. ESV Study Bible - The rulers who executed Jesus did not understand what they were doing (cf. Luke 23:34). Paul and the Corinthians would also have failed to understand Christ's death apart from the Spirit's revelation to them about its meaning.
 - 2. The quote from Isaiah 64:4, often memorized, but perhaps pulled out of context.
 - a. We often use it to describe how we can't imagine how great heaven will be.
 - b. In the context, it is used to support the point. Natural eyes, ear, and minds cannot understand God's wisdom unless God reached out.

- c. MacArthur: “What man cannot find God has given. Man cannot come to God on his own but God has come to him. The HS has invaded man’s closed box and shown him God – through revelation, inspiration, and illumination.”
 - iii. In revealing Himself, God has taken ***initiative*** to make Himself ***known*** to people through general and specific ways. (Psalm 19; Romans 1:18-20)
 - 1. No one knows God’s thoughts except God.
 - 2. True to our experience – no person fully understands us. No one fully knows your thoughts. Knows what it is like to be you. Knows your thoughts.
 - a. Even your closest friend, your husband or wife, your family – can’t fully know your thoughts.
 - 3. But God took initiative to reveal Himself so that we could know Him.
 - 4. Something less complex couldn’t understand something more complex.
 - a. Your dog cannot understand why you do what you do.
 - b. We cannot understand why God does what He does, unless He explains it to us. Even then, we need to remember Deuteronomy 29:29.
 - c. **Deuteronomy 29:29** "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.
 - i. He hasn’t revealed everything. Somethings are “secret,” but the things He has revealed belong to us – we can and should know them and study them out.
- b. To ***inspire*** the Word (2:12-13)
 - i. God’s Word is inspired and inerrant.
 - 1. In it we know “the things freely given to us by God” “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit.”
 - 2. In inspiring the Bible, God worked through the human authors so that they ***composed*** and recorded without error His message to mankind. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
 - a. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
 - b. Revelation as more “vertical” and inspiration as more “horizontal” in that it describes the way in which God worked so that this revelation could be communicated to others and passed down.
 - ii. One prominent pastor in his inaugural message to his church preached on this passage. As the congregation turned there and he heard their pages flip, he said if he could choose one symbolic sound that their church would be known for it would be the sound of 500 Bible simultaneously turning to the verses they were about to study. He was a powerful communicator but he wanted the attention drawn to the Word. That’s where the power is found.
- c. To ***indwell*** the believer (2:14-16)
 - i. The natural man is contrasted with the spiritual man.

1. Natural man cannot understand or accept the things in the Bible.
 - a. He cannot appraise them – meaning make a judgement on them.
 2. Spiritual man can appraise them because of the work of the Holy Spirit in His life.
 - a. This isn't just the person who is more in touch with spiritual things, more open to the idea of miracles or angels, as opposed to a "natural man" who only cares about science. That's not the contrast.
 - b. "Spiritual" is someone who has the Holy Spirit living within him or her; it's the Christian.
 - ii. The natural man cannot "appraise" or judge the spiritual man.
 1. Just as it is impossible for a natural man, the world, to fully understand and appreciate and accept God's Word, so it is impossible for the natural man to understand the Christian fully.
 - iii. Specifically, we need the Holy Spirit to illumine His Word.
 - iv. By illuminating believers, the Holy Spirit to enables God's people to **understand** God's Word (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:14-15)
 1. **John 16:13** "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.
 2. **Psalm 119:18** Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.
 - v. Often before we study the Word on a Sunday morning, I pray something like, "Lord, help us to understand...help us to have eyes to see..."
 1. Praying for the illuminating work of the Spirit.
 2. You've probably had the experience of a verse suddenly jumping out at you as you read on your own. Or an argument suddenly makes sense.
3. Truths that matter
- a. Read, study, listen to, memorize, and meditate on God's **Word**.
 - b. **Pray** for the Holy Spirit to work as you **talk** to people about the crucified Christ.



1

1. Focusing on the Crucified Christ (2:1-5)

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2 Corinthians 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

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2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

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2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

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