

“We Have the Mind of Christ”

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1 Corinthians 2:1-16

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

6 Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9

But, as it is written,
“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?"

But we have the mind of Christ.

DO THEY REALLY HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST?

Paul told the Church at Corinth,
"We have the mind of Christ."

Sometimes I wonder if Paul was overly optimistic when it came to the Corinthians.

You'll remember that he began his letter by saying that they were saints, called by God.

He said that that they were a gifted congregation, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in today's lesson he tells them that they have the "mind of Christ."

But, we also know that in between these extraordinary claims of power and spiritual privilege Paul describes what the Corinthians are actually doing. Their spiritual gifts have been wasted.

Instead of using their gifts to bring people together, they used their gifts to create division and dissension.

They were divided over leadership.

They were divided over theology.

They were divided over morality.

They treated each other in a way that is shameful.

Even the Lord's Supper had become a time marked by division and dissension instead of a time of grace and nourishment.

If these Corinthians are saints, if they have every spiritual gift, if they have the mind of Christ, where did they go wrong? How did this gifted congregation become the poster child for what it means to be a church in deep trouble?

Maybe we should ask ourselves the same question.

If we are saints called by God, if we have every spiritual gift, if we have the mind of Christ, then why is the church still in such a mess today?

I hate to tell you this, but the problems experienced by the Christians at Corinth are not unique to that ancient church.

The church today is still struggling over issues of leadership, theology and morality.

The Lord's Supper is still something that often divides us. Instead of the Lord's Supper being a table of grace, something that brings people from all over the world together, it has become a reason to argue and exclude.

What's wrong with us?

Why can we be the people we are called to be?

Why can't we have the mind of Christ?

FOCUSED ON THE CROSS

In today's lesson Paul suggests that how we proclaim the gospel is just as important as what we say.

If we talk about God's grace in an ungracious way, how can anyone hear the gospel?

If the cross of Christ is at the center of our faith, how can we live a life that is focused solely on us and what we want?

True faith is not based upon us and what we want.

True faith is based upon what God has revealed to us in God's Word ... and what God requires of us.

We can know a lot about God and still not really know God.

Paul recognized that he had made this mistake in the past.

Paul had been a man of great accomplishment.

He studied under the best rabbis.

He was a righteous man who kept the law.

He was a religious leader who wanted to stamp out heresy.

He did not want to dilute God's word in any way.

But, in his letter to the Philippians Paul stated that none of these accomplishments were important. His accomplishments were rubbish in comparison to his relationship with Christ.

When Paul learned that Christ died for his sins on the cross, that in Jesus Christ he was forgiven ... grace changed the way he thought and the way he lived.

And so when Paul came to the Corinthians, he did not come as a religious expert.

He did not come as a great preacher.

He did not come as a person who was important and powerful.

Instead, he focused on the cross of Christ.

You'll remember that Jesus told his disciples on more than one occasion that understanding the cross was the key to following him. They were to take up the cross and follow him.

When they did this it would change their attitude. Unlike the world that values power and achievement, they would value humility, self-denial and sacrifice.

HUMAN WEAKNESS

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they could see this cross shaped lifestyle in how he first came to them. He didn't proclaim the mystery of God with lofty words of wisdom.

Instead, he came in weakness.

That word translated weakness refers to the innate weakness of human nature.

Paul made himself vulnerable before the church at Corinth. He let them see his struggles and his soft spots.

If we want people to understand and accept the gospel, we must be willing to risk coming to them in weakness. We must be honest about our own shortcomings and struggles because that is honest and real.

In this way, we let them know that they are not the only ones who are struggling.

I saw a poster once with a kitten up a tree just barely hanging on by it's claws. The caption read, "Hang in there. Friday's coming."

The truth of the matter is that we're all hanging on like that kitten.

And we're waiting for Friday, but not just any Friday.

We call it Good Friday.

When we come to people in weakness, they are able to hear the message of grace more clearly.

In fact, the message of the cross only makes sense when it is conveyed by a person who knows what it means to be vulnerable and weak.

HOLY FEAR

Not only did Paul come to the Corinthians in weakness, he came in fear.

I think Paul's fear was related to the magnitude of the message he preached.

Our lesson tells us that when he preached the gospel it made him tremble.

It's like that old hymn, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" One line goes, "Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble ...". That was Paul when he preached the gospel to the Corinthians. It caused him to tremble.

If we preach the mystery of God revealed in the crucified Christ, it is not a message to be preached lightly or glibly. It is a message that causes us to tremble.

It is a message that gives us a sense of holy fear.
It is a message that changes how we look at the world.

That's what Paul is talking about in our lesson for today.
He did not speak with plausible words of "wisdom."
Instead, he left room for the working of the Spirit.

He didn't want their faith to rest on human wisdom.
He wanted their faith to rest on the power of God.

Paul didn't want people to believe because he made such a good, persuasive argument.
Paul wanted people to believe because they had met the crucified and risen Lord.

When it comes to salvation, when it comes to knowing God, it's personal.

Just as Paul met the crucified and risen Christ on the road to Damascus, so each one of us must have a "face to face" encounter with Jesus.

What does that mean?

It doesn't necessarily mean that we will have a dramatic Damascus Road experience that's similar to Paul's. (Although that is possible.)

What it does mean is that there will come a time when our assumptions about life will be challenged by the claims of the crucified and risen Christ. There will come a turning point when we realize that all those things that we thought were so important were really not all that important at all.

It will be ... at the same moment ... a time of judgment and a time of salvation.

It will be a time when our world will be turned upside down.

It will be a time when we see clearly the depths of our own sin and the depths of God's grace.

In a moment we will know weakness and fear and trembling, but at the same time we will be stronger than we have ever been before.

WORLDLY WISDOM

This kind of conversion experience seems silly to many people. It always been this way. If you don't believe in sin, why should you need forgiveness?

The world doesn't believe in sin.

The world believes in power and prestige.

What kind of people do we elect as our leaders?

Who are the rulers of this age ... or any age for that matter?

Our leaders are often the personification of worldly wisdom.

Our leaders not only represent us; they often are a reflection of what we believe as a society.

But, what did Paul tell the Corinthians?

He said that the wisdom of this age and the rulers of this age are doomed to perish.

Just as Paul was blind to what he was doing when he persecuted the church, so the world and its leaders are often blind to what is important and what they are really doing.

How do we know that the rulers of this age are not so smart?

Paul put it this way.

The Son of the Living God came to earth, and they crucified Lord of glory.

If they had had clue, they wouldn't have done this.

But, they were prevented from understanding this because they had a different mindset.

The salvation of God was hidden from them.

Don't make the mistake of thinking this passage is just for the Corinthians and other people who lived long ago. We still live in a world that has little room for humility and compassion.

The message of the cross still sounds alien to us.

We elect leaders who tell us what we want to hear instead of what we need to hear.

If anything television and social media have accelerated this so-called worldly wisdom.

And this message is sending us down the road to perdition.

Like the church at Corinth, many churches today have fallen prey to the temptation of this worldly wisdom.

Like the Corinthians, we too have been called to be disciples of Jesus. We too have been given great gifts to carry out this ministry. In the cross of Christ we have seen a down to earth example of God's grace and forgiveness.

But, we have become distracted by the ways of the world.

We have the mind of Christ.

But, sometimes our mind has been clouded by other voices. Good news has been drowned out by fake news.

FAKE NEWS

Lately there's been a lot of talk about "fake news". Let me give you an example of fake news.

There's a story that Fred Rogers used to be a Navy seal, and the reason he wore a sweater was because his arms were covered with tattoos.

That story has been out there a long time. It has been embellished by suggesting he had a lot of confirmed kills and so forth. It's totally false.

Fred was too old to have served in Vietnam (born in 1928), and he spent all of his life in school and/or in educational television. It is true though that in addition to his children's television show he was a very mild mannered Presbyterian minister who abhorred violence of any kind.

But, from time to time someone will send me an email with this urban legend.

Did you know this about Fred Rogers? You should let people know. No matter how many times this story is denied it keeps coming back.

Fake news and the willingness of people of people to believe those lies presents a clear and present danger not only to our democracy but also to our Christian faith.

But, this is not a new phenomena.

The greatest threat to the early church was the tendency to adapt the truth of the gospel to the ways of the world. When they did that, they mixed truth with error and their minds were clouded.

What was it Jesus said?

You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. (John 8:32)

History, both ancient and modern teaches us that the collective “wisdom” of the world often proves to be a lie. From ancient times the truth has often been distorted by culture and by what people want to believe.

I think this is what Paul is talking about when he refers to “human wisdom”. Human beings will accept the most outrageous things as the “truth” because they are a part of culture.

THE CHALLENGE OF CULTURE

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is a good example of this.

The culture and religious practices of ancient Greece were in danger of destroying the church at Corinth. And we’ll be looking at specific examples of this in the weeks to come.

But, here’s the hard question.

How have the falsehoods of culture distorted our faith?

How has the good news been replaced with fake news in our own life?

In some ways, we are like fish and culture is the sea in which we swim.

For that reason it is very difficult for us to understand how culture affects us.

Culture is all around us.
We need it to survive.
We just accept it.

But, sometimes the wisdom of culture is false.
And it prevents us from seeing the God's truth.

When I was taking a class on the Corinthian correspondence in seminary, the teacher read an ancient letter that was written to that church. This letter was written by a Christian leader hundreds of years after Paul wrote his letter.

And wouldn't you know it that church was having the same problems that the apostle Paul addressed hundreds of years before?!

Now you might say,
"Those crazy Corinthians. Why couldn't they learn?"
But, for me, the more interesting question is this: "Why were they having the same problems after all those years?"

And the answer I believe is culture.
The culture in Corinth had not changed, and it was still a struggle for the church in that particular place to preach the gospel. The good news was still being distorted by fake news.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

In our lesson for today Paul suggests a strategy for overcoming fake news. It is to claim a promise.
"We have the mind of Christ."

In other words, when we look at Christ and especially at the cross we see what God is like.

But, more than that, the Spirit of God in Christ is at work in us.

That's why the gospel is not merely good advice.

It's good news.

We believe the power of God is in us and this power has the ability to change us for the better. We become new creations.

Paul said in effect that you can't know what a human being is really like unless you know what they're like on the inside. You may think you know a person, but often you'll be wrong. Who people really are is a mystery to us unless they choose to reveal themselves to us.

Well the same thing is true when it comes to the Lord.

If we can't know what's going on with human beings, then we really can't know God unless God chooses to reveal Himself to us.

Well, God did that.
God was in Christ.

In Jesus the grace of God is revealed in a surprising way through the cross and the resurrection. But, in order for us to see and understand this great truth, one more thing has to happen.

The Spirit of God must become our teacher.
When that happens, we have the mind of Christ.
We understand the gospel on a personal level.

It's not just something that we know intellectually.
It becomes a way of life.
And we become part of a community, a culture that runs counter to the ways of the world.

MIND RENEWAL

The Corinthian culture was so strong that the church found it difficult to preach and live out the message of the gospel.

Paul became so frustrated with this congregation that at one point he seems to throw up his hands and say, "I've got better things to do than to visit those crazy Corinthians."

But, of course, in the long run he couldn't do that.
After all, they were God's saints.
They were called by God.

They had the mind of Christ.

But, they would also struggle for many years.
Their Christian mind continued to be clouded by the ways of the world.

I would suggest that we face a similar if not greater challenge.

How can we be who we are called to be when we live in a community that calls us so strongly to be something else?

How can we keep our spiritual mind from being distorted by culture? I think it takes spiritual maintenance.

Like Paul we admit our weakness and our fears, and then in all humility we submit ourselves to the honest introspection that comes from of personal and group Bible study.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he wrote,
"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

In other words, in order to have the mind of Christ, we have to have our mind renewed by submitting to the will of God as revealed in God's Word.

We live in dangerous times.
And as disciples of Jesus Christ we have an important job to do.

We are called to replace fake news with good news.
We are called to preach a truth that will set us free.

The world will continue to spread its lies, but remember and stand on this promise,

"We have the mind of Christ."
Amen.