

## S E R M O N   N O T E S

**1 Corinthians 2:2-16 – Illumination and Confession**  
**July 15, 2012, 7 PM – Craig Swain**

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### **Order of Service:**

**Prayer** – Praise and Call to Worship

**Scripture Reading** - 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5

**Hymnal #94** - How Firm a Foundation

**Bulletin Hymn** - Open My Eyes, That I May See

**Prayer** – Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication

**Message** - Illumination and Confession, **1 Cor. 2:6-16**

**Hymnal #538** - More about Jesus Would I Know

**Closing Prayer**

### ***ILLUMINATION AND CONFESSION***

Our subject tonight is illumination and confession, and let's start with an introduction.

### **Introduction**

We just read 1 Corinthians 2:5 – “that your faith might not rest (or stand) in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

As Christians, most of us have walked out of a sermon or a conference message, or stopped the tape player, or just finished in some forum where God's word is being explained and expounded; and sometimes, we've just been lit up with the joy of knowing something wonderful about our God, or His work, or His work in us.

And that feeling of quiet satisfaction or of great emotions just comes welling up when we see something that is divine, something that all of a sudden we KNOW about our God that we just didn't know before. For me, it even causes tears of joy or sorrow depending on what I just learned. And sometimes you just have to run off to someone you value and I just have to share what I learned. Didn't it just bring me great joy? And that person may be just as moved; though often, maybe not quite so.

Other times, we're walking out of a meeting around the word, and the guy or gal with us seems to be lit up like that, and we aren't. Or we're amazed at some truth God just revealed to us, saying, "Wow, what a blessing, I never realized that before...", and then we might overhear the person beside us telling a friend, "I just didn't get that today; it was hard to follow."

So what is this? How does this book [hold up Bible], proclaimed by the same person with the same words, get these varied responses? And, once we happen to know something from this book, what do we do with it? That's our outline for tonight.

1. What is revealed?
2. Why do some understand and some don't?
3. What do we do with it?

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

## [PRAY]

This is a topical message tonight, though most of it will come from our **text in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16**, and we'll be looking at several points Paul is being used to give us here. Again, the text is 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; the topic is "**Illumination and Confession.**"

Let's pick up Paul's thought with **verse 6**, where the ESV reads, "Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom..." The NASB and the KJV translations follow the word order in the Greek a little more closely, saying "yet" or "howbeit" "we speak wisdom among those who are mature" or "them that are perfect". In the Greek, the first word in the sentence is "Sophian" or wisdom.

So a more literal rendering is “Wisdom yet we speak”, and this follows verse five, so we know it is not the wisdom of men. And from the **rest of verse 6**, we know: “it is not a wisdom of this age” or “of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.”

Who is Paul speaking this wisdom to? We know from 1:10 that he is appealing to brothers, and in 2:1, he says, “And I, when I came to you, brothers...” And here in 2:6 he is speaking among the “mature.” The Greek word for mature can be translated perfect, adult, of full age, etc.

Paul then warns these mature Christians that not everyone is going to understand this wisdom. Paul has already said it is not of men, it is not of this age, it is not of the rulers of the age.

What kind of wisdom is Paul speaking of? He tells us in **verse 7**, which reads, “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.”

I think the Corinthians knew exactly the mystery he is talking about from his previous stay, about 18 months between 50 and 52 AD, when founding the church there. You and I know from Paul’s other epistles that the mystery he is speaking of here is the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ planned or predestined before the creation and being proclaimed to the world. Four quick examples (you don’t need to turn with me):

**Romans 16:25-26** – <sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— (ESV)

**Ephesians 3:9-11** – <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, (ESV)

**Colossians 1:26-27** – <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (ESV)

**2 Timothy 1:9-10** – <sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup> and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, (ESV)

Now back to 1 Cor. 2:7 – Paul is imparting this Gospel that had been a mystery to the world and its leaders. He goes on in **verse 8** by pointing out that if they had understanding of who Jesus was, they would not have crucified the Lord. (**Read** verse 8.) In **verse 9**, Paul reiterates that the plan of God in Christ was a mystery, something the heart of man could not imagine. He personalizes this for the mature Christians who are listening to him, not even they, not even you and me, can imagine what God has prepared for those who love Him since we have understanding, unlike the rulers of the age. (**read** verse 9)

So Paul is proclaiming the gospel, and it is a wisdom that many just do not understand. And that completes our introduction and takes us to part 1, or Roman numeral I. if you are outlining.

## I. **What is revealed?**

**A. *The Gospel is now revealed – see Verse 10 and 11 - 1 Cor. 2:10-11 – “<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 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. (ESV)***

What are the things Paul is speaking of? We just saw that he is speaking of God's wisdom in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus had been hidden - as we've seen in the previous verses. It is true for Israel that God had revealed their need to for a redeemer, an eternal priest-king,

in the law and the prophets, but the details of God the Son coming as Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man, to die a substitutionary death had not been revealed. Unlike the creation around us, which tells us something of God, the knowledge of the mystery of the gospel has to be revealed by God. The revelation of this special knowledge is called special revelation, or just revelation, and as verse 10 states, is it given through the Spirit.

**B. *Revealed things were actually hidden, too*** – compare this gospel now revealed to the knowledge all men get from creation:

**1. Romans 1:19-22** –<sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (ESV)

**2.** The general knowledge of God, according to the Romans passage, is plainly available but not understood. This general knowledge is termed general revelation, and while men get some of it, even the general knowledge of God is not understood by men. And why not, because “their foolish hearts were darkened”. And we can read that in the present tense, too. When we don’t understand what the creation tells us about God, it’s because our foolish hearts are darkened.

**3.** The Spirit makes God known - If it has to do with God, either from the special revelation of the gospel given to the apostles, and proclaimed to the Corinthians and us, or even just from observing His creation, it is the Spirit who knows God and who makes God known. We see this as Paul goes on in **Verses 12 and 13**.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-13** –<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (ESV)

So Paul, and the prophets and the apostles, are given this wisdom by the Spirit and they teach it or impart it. Notice how they do it though.

And that takes us to point 2, or Roman numeral II.

## II. Why do some understand and some don't?

**A. They are "spiritual"** - Paul says he is "interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual" Who are these who are spiritual? They are the ones getting and understanding the interpretation. More in a moment.

**B. The natural person** -- see **verse 14** -- "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." (ESV)

So the natural person, literally the natural man, does not accept, or does not receive, the things of the Spirit of God. Couple of points here are interesting:

1. This doesn't say the natural man cannot understand, that is actually said in other places in scripture, such as the parable of the sower; but, it says he does not receive or accept. So the things of the Spirit of God are unacceptable to or unreceivable by the natural man. Whether discernible from nature and general revelation, or discernible in special revelation, the Bible, the words given by the Holy Spirit and written down, the natural man hears, but cannot accept the things of the Spirit, including the truth of the mystery of the gospel.

2. The things of the Spirit of God are folly to the natural man. If you have tried to present the gospel to someone who is just not accepting it, then you know the experience of being thought a fool.

The natural man hears something unacceptable, rejects it, and usually rejects the one bringing them what sounds like folly to them. So if we share the gospel, we have to be ready to be thought of as fools, and yet love those thinking this of us and of the truth of the gospel. Apart from being given spiritual discernment, they cannot understand.

3. To understand the things of the Spirit of God, including these spiritual words in the Bible, a person has to have spiritual discernment according to verse 14. Where do we get spiritual discernment?

**C.** Verse 15 - The “spiritual person”, the one with the spiritual discernment from verse 14, is called on to judge. They are to judge all things, and these include the spiritual things Paul has received from the Holy Spirit and is interpreting for the Corinthians and for us. **Verse 15** – “The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.” (ESV)

That last phrase, “himself to be judged by no one”, is Paul telling us who the spiritual person is: it is the person whose transgressions are forgiven because of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ for all who repent and believe. That quick reference alone may not be plain enough, so Paul gives verse 16.

**D.** **Verse 16** – Paul states the question that came to our mind from verse 14 when we wonder who has the ability to spiritually discern. He asks the question as: 1 Cor. 2:16 – “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”

So who has spiritual discernment? See the rest of the verse: “But we have the mind of Christ.” Again, the one with spiritual discernment has been given something not possessed while a natural man, it is spiritual discernment, it is the mind of Christ. As Paul earlier stated back in verse 11, this knowledge of spiritual things, including the mystery of the gospel and spiritual discernment, which is the mind of Christ, only comes from the Holy Spirit.

1. We cannot accept or discern spiritual things apart of the work of the Spirit. So to read these spiritual words, the Bible, without the work of the Spirit within in, and it seems foolish and therefore hard and a waste.

2. Paul goes on in Chapter 3 and the rest of the letter to address many problems in the Corinthian church. He even starts out in 3:1 indicating that this discernment is not uniformly the same, but is held at different levels. We started with Paul addressing the Corinthians and us as adults, and he changes in chapter 3 to address them as infants or as “infants in Christ”.

### **III. What do we do with it?**

**A. Use the discernment** - The rest of Paul’s letter here to the Corinthians is devoted calling upon them to use the discernment, the mind of Christ, they have been given and to live it out.

We are to be spiritually discerning of the things of the Holy Spirit, and particularly of the gospel, this Bible, we have been given. We are to put aside division and immorality, and live our lives to the glory of God, in the love of God, and in the hope of the resurrection promised by the gospel. The rest of this epistle, and all of God’s word, is full of this instruction.

**B.** The key part of that instruction is that we fill ourselves with the love of God , AND, with the knowledge of God’s word, which are the things of the Spirit. Paul expects the Corinthians to pay attention to the spiritual words he is giving them from the Holy Spirit, and he expects them to know the OT scriptures. We know this from his quote from several passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah back in verse 9, which begins, “as it is written.”

**C.** As your elders we strive to help all of us grow in this discernment, this illumination of the Spirit in having the mind of Christ. (That is not the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the giving of the Word.) As part of growing this discernment, this Christ-mind-likeness, or Christ-likeness, we want ourselves and every believer to be:



1. In communion, via prayer, with God most of every day
2. Actively reading and studying the word of God every day
3. Assembling regularly with Christians in worship to receive and obey Spiritual instruction
4. Talking informally with Christians several times a week, giving personal details and struggles, to help encourage each other in being more discerning and accountable to God
5. Doing additional reading every week from the writings of other believers who have struggled to grow in discernment and can help us do so.

## Conclusion (Application)

- A. As part of the useful tools we have from God to help us grow in discernment, we also, along with many believers from the past, document what we find to be true, **and then we live by it**. Some of it is very clear from Scripture and some not so clear.
- B. We use the material that we think helps us summarize the truths of Scripture in a helpful way for us and we share them. That is obvious with Christian books, literature, songs, prayers, and tracts we use. But we also use summary forms of these truths where we think the Scriptures are clear on something vital, and these documents we call confessions.
- C. Confessions are scriptural – we see examples of them in the Bible, and I'll give you one; please turn to:  
  
**1 Timothy 3:16** – Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (ESV)

- D.** We think these are helpful, vital even, to help us grown in discernment and in the resulting practice. And unlike many forms of teaching that tell hold to or do or not do something right now, confessions emphasize doing them for the duration of your time in this age. Not just doing for a point in time, but ongoing and together. You will hear some more on some of our confessional stands on doctrine and practice after the Mark series. These will be given to help us all grow in discernment. Please note:
1. Confessions that are not part of scripture are not from men inspired directly by the Holy Spirit to produce scripture, but are from men growing in discernment. They will contain helpful things, and things that “need maturing” (errors).
  2. We think the Biblical practice of confessions, of summarizing and then holding fast to areas of truth, like in 1 Tim. 3:16, is one of the keys to growing in discernment, and so we have a confession and treat it seriously. We want all members to know and understand it at least somewhat, and be growing in that understanding.
  3. We know these are not inspired, and we do not treat confessions as scripture. If you have looked at our confession, it is based on the London Baptist Confession of 1689, almost entirely. But, where we see error, we have modified it according to our discernment – for example, we don’t think the pope, a particular one or the office is “the” anti-Christ of the NT, though we regard much of what they teach makes them an anti-Christ.
- E.** Last, we are all growing. Some things that don’t make sense when you first hear them, when you walk out of a message or other instruction, and your family is saying “Wow!” and you are saying “Huh?” happens to us as we grow. We have been told throughout this book what to do to change from babes in Christ to mature Christians, and that this requires the Spirit’s work. Pray for that help and illumination as we seek to know more about the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to be more like Him. And work at it, too. Prayer without work or work without prayer will be fruitless! That takes us to our concluding hymn.