

Sunday June 12, 2022

Lesson 2: The Spirit Gives Wisdom

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2: 10-16

Context:

As we continue into the season of Pentecost, we examine places in scripture where we see the Holy Spirit play a prominent role in guiding the early church. We connect those same experiences of the early church to how the Spirit works today. Today we examine how the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom.

The lesson today comes from the book of First Corinthians, a letter addressed to the church in Corinth. In the sections leading up to this part of the letter, Paul has made clear how we relate to God is not primarily through knowledge or wisdom, but through love.¹ Love is what drives everything and is supplemented through knowledge and wisdom. Paul continues to emphasize as much when in verses ten through thirteen, he asserts the hidden wisdom of God (Christ crucified) is revealed to us by the Spirit of God.² It is a holy mystery as something given graciously to us by God.

Yet as with all mysteries, one wonders how to understand what to do or what it means. According to Paul, the mysteries do not become known through spiritual gifts but through the gift of God's deliverance through the cross.³ As Christians understand the power of the cross through the Spirit, they discover how to articulate their faith and can do so in a non-threatening or defensive means. Christians can speak of their identity of God not through philosophical instructions or lessons on rhetorical declamation but because they have been taught by the Spirit of God how to speak of God through the word of the cross.⁴ In some ways, this is a jab at those who believe spiritual belief comes primarily through long treatises or head knowledge to know God. Secret knowledge or superiority complexes about how one is educated about the cross does not make one a follower of Jesus.

Paul specifically focuses on how revelation plays a prominent role in the Christian community knowing God. Verse fourteen emphasizes how some people just don't "get it" as they are stuck in certain practices and certain ways. When in verse fifteen, he refers to those as spiritual as not being subject to scrutiny, he is not suggesting Christians are no longer exempt from accountability in the church.⁵ Instead, they can see the reality and should be able to explain the saving power of their faith. The closing verses highlight how those who are spiritual should

¹ Hays, Richard B. "First Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 45.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁵ Ibid.

be able to see the power of the crucified one and the gift Christ gives through himself.

Application

As someone who enjoyed going to school and has a lifelong love of learning, I have at times been tempted to believe knowledge is equated to wisdom. If you read certain writers, or know certain things, there is the assumption you can become proficient at life and thus “get ahead” or be prepared for life. Yet the more I have gone through life, I have discovered while they may complement one another, wisdom and knowledge can also be very different and are not synonymous.

Knowledge can certainly be a gift to us. Hopefully everyone has something they learn to see as an area where they can be knowledgeable. Whether it is academic disciplines or hobbies like wood carving or even knowing random baseball statistics, there is joy to be found in discovering facts and practices which give us life or excitement. Knowledge can come in many forms and can make all of us more aware of things in this life.

Yet wisdom is something different. Wisdom is being able to discern what the facts might say and then the other things present like feelings or energy. Wisdom often taking learning as beyond a mind-based collection to an awareness of feelings and things within us and applying those to our decisions and interactions with how we live with one another. And contrary to popular belief, wisdom may or may not come with age. While I am incredibly grateful for some of the individuals in my life who are older than me and display wisdom, I have seen other older individuals who tend to focus more on knowledge and ego than wisdom.

The focus of the lesson is to look at human wisdom versus spiritual wisdom. At first, I wrestled with how to approach understanding the point and yet as I read Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, I realized what he is getting at as he sought to help the Corinthians discern between human wisdom and spiritual wisdom. The differences are there, and we see them play out today.

Often when humans rely on knowledge, they come up with an argument for what they want to do, and they can have pretty good charts and boxes so everything makes sense. They can point to statistics or facts and might even point to other examples beyond the church of how those things work. There is a focus on being right, speaking from a place in which because you can do certain things with the information you possess, you can just do them. An example of this can be seen in situations of interpreting scripture and even in approaching conflicts. The “facts” are there, in black and white.

Spiritual wisdom calls us to go a little deeper than our desires and our “knowledge.” Spiritual wisdom invites us to reflect on what God is doing within us and if our words and our actions truly reflect the Triune God, or the Trinity is added on as an addendum to make us feel better for the choices we make in this life. If put into simplicity’s sake, I would go back to the three rules John Wesley cultivated to aide Christians into discerning God’s will. Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. If our actions and behaviors cannot reflect these rules, we have moved to a place where human knowledge and wisdom is more important than spiritual wisdom and the gift of the Spirit of God at work in and through us.

The people in my life who have spiritual wisdom are those who always think of others and the long-term effects of decisions on individuals and groups of people. They do not focus on what they will get out of things or what is the best thing for them to benefit individually. They focus on what God has called them to do and if it harms someone else whoever that may be, does not promote goodness or unity, and divides people from worshipping and loving God, they

practice wisdom and say no. The facts may not make their decisions or ethics make sense to others. It might even make others mad. And yet they know the importance of spiritual wisdom over human knowledge and how God has called us to be accountable to what we say and do in God's name.

How do you discern the differences between wisdom and knowledge? Why can it be tempting to believe knowledge is equal to wisdom? Who are people you look to for wisdom in your life? Who are the people who hold you accountable to discern between human wisdom and spiritual wisdom? What spiritual disciplines help you grow in wisdom?

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