

## **The Future of Your Body** *Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*

### **Which Do You Want More? Jesus or Worldly Power?** *1 Corinthians 2:3 – 3:4*

#### **Introduction: Being a Camp Counselor**

After my freshman year of college, I went to be a Christian camp counselor at a week-long family camp. I was a counselor for rising seniors in high school, boys. This was through my home church, a Japanese American church, and a few sister churches on the West Coast. It was also one of my first experiences in ministry, so I was a little nervous. But the boys, who were wanna-be Asian gangsters, seemed to respect me. Even late at night when I would tell them to go to bed. Now it seemed to me like they respected me for fairly superficial reasons, like the fact that at the time I drove a car that they liked, or that I had a cool jacket, or that I went to Stanford. They didn't really care much about my experience with Jesus. But at the time, I didn't mind, because it helped me get some sleep! I had the chance to meet up with some of them a couple weeks later at a post-conference rally. I talked with one of the boys. I asked him how it was going. He said fine. I asked how he was doing spiritually. He said, "Well, I'd like to be a good Christian, but I don't think I can." I asked him why. He said, "Because I can't be a really good student." Deep in my gut, I wanted to say, "But you don't have to be a really good student to be a good follower of Jesus," but I didn't know how to say it at the time. On my way home, I felt like God helped me piece it together. I knew that what that young man was saying was, "I can't be a good Christian, because I can't be successful like you." I said back to God, "But I never said that." God seemed to say in reply, "You didn't have to. It's still in your heart. It's good for kids to drop the violence and the posturing. But you value Jesus AND worldly success equally, and here is a time to examine that – what do you really value?" I went home and cried. That was a real shock to me.

So often we think if we have Jesus AND are part of the successful group, we'll be better off. Don't get me wrong: It's good to come to Jesus if you're powerful. It's good to come to Jesus if you're wealthy. But we don't need those things to be faithful followers of Jesus. Jesus doesn't need us to acquire them. That is good news, but also challenging. Yet sometimes the hierarchies of power in the world affects our relationships within the body of Christ. Maybe it's about wealth. Maybe it's about formal education. Maybe it's about physical attractiveness. And at those times, the question for us is whether we will live in hope: not a flimsy hope and wish, but a strong hope. In eternity, the true body of Christ will be one, despite all our differences now. Do we live in light of that hope? If we do, we will live in real love.

#### **Context**

We are in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which I nickname *The Future of Your Body*. This amazing letter is an example of how Jesus is Lord, even in the brutal and sexualized Greco-Roman world. We study it to know how Jesus is Lord in our world, which is also brutal and sexualized. The apostle Paul is writing five main essays, all about how the future of your body is resurrection. The first essay is about unity in the corporate body of Christ, and why unity is important because Jesus has one body, and we are part of it. The second essay is about sex and your individual body and your corporate body. The third essay is about your body in the mission of Jesus. The fourth essay is about worship in the corporate body of Christ. The fifth is about the resurrection body of Jesus and our future resurrected bodies. We are in the first essay about unity.

Two weeks ago, Rick described the problem the Corinthians were having. In Greece, traveling teachers, philosophers called 'Sophists', would visit a city. If they made a good impression, they would win citizenship, set up a school, and begin receiving students for a fee: male students from wealthy backgrounds. Students would then become devoted to their teachers, imitating their speech, walk, dress, etc. They would also debate students from other schools, engaging in verbal and sometimes physical attacks. It was like a for-profit college that exploits its students *and* brainwashes them. So the Corinthian Christians carry that cultural background with them into their Christian life. They picked among the 'alpha males': Paul, Apollos, and Simon Peter. They break up and line up behind these guys as if they were the same kinds of teachers. Paul says NO!

Last week, T.C. talked about how Jesus in his vulnerability, which seemed foolish and powerless, is actually the power of God to bring unity in his own body. Jesus was vulnerable, and he calls us into vulnerable humility and then good relationships in the body of Christ. Now Paul takes his argument one step deeper, and we will feel the

razor sharp logic of a truly Christian mind cutting through the sin that needs to be rooted out of us. Paul's argument unfolds here in four major steps. First, in 2:3 – 6, he says that you didn't come to Jesus that way. Second, in 2:7 – 10a, he says you're so much about worldly power, success, and probably money, that you're acting like the politicians who killed Jesus. Third, in 2:10b – 16, here's how we know Jesus and the truth about him. But fourth, in 3:1 – 4, you won't be able to understand more until you stop fighting, reconcile, and live a life of love.

### First – You Didn't Come to Jesus That Way: 2:3 – 6

Paul's first point is, 'You didn't come to Jesus that way.' This passage, and in my opinion every passage, is in the form of a chiasm. A chiasm is a way of organizing ideas. The first point matches the last point. The second point matches the second to last point. And so on, until you get to the center point, which is the main point.

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| <p><sup>2:3</sup> I was with you in weakness<br/>and in fear and in much trembling,<br/>    <sup>4</sup> and my message and my preaching<br/>    were not in persuasive words of wisdom,<br/>        but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,<br/>            <sup>5</sup> so that your faith would not rest<br/>            on the wisdom of men,<br/>            but on the power of God.<br/><sup>6</sup> Yet we do speak wisdom<br/>    among those who are mature;<br/>a wisdom, however, not of this age<br/>nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;</p> | <p>I was weak<br/><br/>message: not 'in wisdom'<br/><br/>but of the Spirit's power<br/>    your faith rests<br/>    not on human 'wisdom'<br/>but on the power of God<br/><br/>message: 'wisdom' to the mature<br/><br/>not of the powers of this age</p> |
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Paul makes a contrast between himself as an apostle of Jesus (v.3), and the rulers of this age (v.6). When Paul got to Corinth, he didn't look like a successful teacher. At least not in the way the Corinthians were used to other 'stronger' teachers. Paul seemed weak. How? First of all, he supported himself by working with his hands. He made tents, cloth, and ropes, probably out of goat's hair, animals skins, and leather. He probably learned it from his father, which was typical in Jewish culture. But in Greek culture, successful teachers didn't work with their hands. They just charged money from their students. By the way, mostly the wealthy got educated, and among them only boys. Paul did not charge money. He did manual labor so the Corinthians didn't have to pay him. So in the eyes of Greek culture, he looked weak, like a not very successful teacher. He was also physically beaten up, and his body showed it. By this time in his life, Paul had been flogged by two Jewish synagogues, and once stoned almost to death. That kind of thing left scars on Paul's back and physical problems in his joints. There's a hint in Galatians 4:15 that he had a damaged eye, probably because a stone hit him in the face. Why had he been beaten up? Because Jewish synagogues rejected him, and floggings were the official rejection. At first they welcomed Paul because he was a trained rabbi, with a famous mentor. But when he started talking about Jesus being the Jewish messiah, after a while they would reject him and label him a heretic. That meant thirty-nine lashes with a whip or a rod. The floggings meant 'don't come back.' So for a wandering teacher to come into town wearing the marks of rejection from other towns – that raised real questions. Was Paul a good teacher or not? He didn't look that way, from the standards of Greek culture or Jewish culture for that matter.

Furthermore, Paul was 'in fear and in much trembling' (v.3). Why? Because he was afraid of getting beaten up again! Just a few months or even weeks ago, he had been flogged in Philippi (Acts 16:22). So his back was probably still healing from that. He was afraid that the Jewish synagogue in Corinth would kill him, that this would be his last assignment for Jesus. Jesus had to speak to Paul in a vision to not be afraid and keep on teaching (Acts 18:9 – 10).

Now Paul contrasts himself, on the other side of the chiasm, with 'the rulers of this age.' In a sense, they are powerful, confident, successful – or at least they look it when they're not hiring hit men to murder anyone who would challenge them. He's also including the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, which would have been important for the people of Jewish background in Corinth, but for sure he's thinking about Caesar in Rome and Pontius Pilate in Judea.

Why does Paul contrast himself with guys like Caesar or Pontius Pilate? Because he wants us to see all the way down that road. If you love power, if you become a good speaker to acquire power, if you get an education for the

sake of power, then you would normally climb the social ladder. In the Roman Empire, if you were a great speaker, you could become a trial lawyer, a politician, even a Roman Senator. For example, there was one guy named Cicero who is still studied today. He did not come from the highest class, and was semi-crippled, yet because of his great speaking ability became a Senator. So that's why there is a link here between 'wisdom' and power: wisdom in a worldly sense, in the sense of being a great speaker, could get you a lot of power. The apostles may or may not be great speakers in a theatrical, or technical, sense. And they were definitely not rich or successful. But they speak the truth. They speak about Jesus; and they pay for it with their lives.

Illus: Sometimes we pay for it in other ways. As many of you know, I work for a campus ministry called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We are present at over 600 colleges and universities across the country. This month, something happened that affects many of us. The California Cal State public school system, decided to kick Christian groups like InterVarsity off campus. The Cal State system in CA is like the UMass system in MA. There are 23 Cal State schools in the system. Practically speaking, they cannot get any funding from the university like other student groups. They may have trouble advertising Bible studies and events. But the bigger issue is that the students cannot reserve classrooms or meeting rooms on campus. The reason? Because we believe that Christian groups should be led by Christians, and we say so in our groups' constitutions. We also believe that Muslim groups should be led by Muslims, atheist groups should be led by atheists, and so on. We feel that's reasonable and protects the groups from a hostile takeover, and that it contributes to the diversity on campus. But the Cal State system believes that every student group needs to have an 'all comers' policy for student leaders. Not just members or attenders, which we do because all are welcome, but leaders. In other words, they apparently believe that an atheist should be able to get into office in a Muslim group, or a Buddhist should be able to lead a Christian group, or for that matter that a Republican should be able to lead the Democrats student group. My dad went to Cal State Los Angeles for college. I wonder what his life would have been like if he had met some Christians who reached out to him, with respectable student leaders who had integrity and compassion. He was one of many young people from a lower income and ethnic minority community who saw college as a place where he might discover something about his future. Today, Cal State LA has over 23,000 students. But for me, it's not just personal. It's about integrity. What does it mean to be faithful to Jesus? Christian groups by definition need to be led by those who actually know Jesus!

Paul wants our faith to rest NOT on whether universities think we're legit, NOT on whether Christians have the most power, or are making the most money, but on the Spirit. In v.4 – 5, he says: '4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.'

Illus: For me, that is exactly the way it happened. I came to Jesus in a town in Mexico called Mexicali. I had been going to this church with a good friend from high school. I was spiritually searching because my parents had started arguing about divorce. That rocked my world. And I was discovering not so good things about myself in how I was reacting. So I signed up for this one spring break trip, because I thought we were going to build houses like Habitat for Humanity. Instead, we played with kids. And I didn't like kids! But every day we would play soccer with them, and tell them Bible stories. That was the other thing that made it awkward for me. We were telling Bible stories, and I wasn't even a Christian! So the whole time, I wanted to go home. I had never seen poverty like that, where families lived in 'houses' made of three cardboard walls and a tin roof, when I couldn't even drink tap water or put shower water in my mouth. And it was in the middle of the competitive swimming season, and I was a competitive swimmer. No one who was a serious athlete took a week off to do that kind of stuff in the middle of the season. I'd go with my team to hang out with these kids, and I wondered, 'Do you even know who I am? Do you know what sacrifice I'm making to be here?' Isn't that a terrible attitude? Well, I was terrible. I was so into worldly power and worldly wisdom, that I didn't want to be there. But I looked around and saw all these other people – they were all Christians – who enjoyed being there. They enjoyed the kids. And somewhere deep in my heart, I knew that these kids were worth it. My mind rebelled against that feeling. I thought, 'Maybe these kids are worth someone else's time to do this, but not mine. I could do more good later in some other way...' And in my atheist mind, I found no reason for what my heart was telling me was true. So I decided: It must be Jesus. Jesus loves these children, because his heart is big, and mine is small. And I need him. I need him to change me. That was the 'demonstration of the Spirit [of Jesus] and of power.' The Spirit's power is shown by people's conversion to Jesus, and his transformation of them.

So if you've ever felt less impressive by the world's standards, less qualified by the world's standards, or even less attractive by the world's standards, know this: God uses children. He uses us when we feel vulnerable, or not qualified, or not impressive, or not confident. He uses us when we are weak, when we're afraid, when you just woke up and you have bed head, when you are not looking your best. So don't count yourself out for those reasons, because God hasn't!!

Now wait a minute! What if you DID experience miracles when you came to Jesus? I know people who came to Jesus by being physically healed. On some occasions, God does do signs, like physical healing, to demonstrate His presence. But here in Corinth, Paul was probably just preaching at first. Paul said in the previous section (1:10 – 2:2) that he didn't do signs when he first got there. And according to Luke's account of Paul in Corinth, in Acts 18:1 – 18, there were no miracles recorded. Apparently Jesus wanted to introduce himself to the Corinthians in some other way. Dr. Gordon Fee, one of the leading scholars of the New Testament, and a Pentecostal minister, says that this is referring to the power of the Spirit in conviction and conversion.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Fee's Pentecostal credentials are very important here because Pentecostals are very interested in miracles and supernatural power, and would love to see it in Scripture whenever they can! I would love to see it here, too! But Fee argues that 'the Spirit and power' is an expression (an idiom called a literary *hendiadys*) where two things put together refer to one thing. Examples nowadays would include: 'moan and groan' or 'wheel and deal' or others. It may sound repetitious, but that's part of the point. The 'Spirit and power' in v.4 is a way of saying 'the power of God' in v.5, and the chiasm reinforces that point.<sup>2</sup> Maybe Apollos and Simon Peter did miracles, which made the Corinthians reach the wrong conclusion that they were more spiritual or more powerful than Paul.

That's both good and challenging for us. It's GOOD for us because it means God wants to use you and me, even in our weaknesses! You don't have to be eloquent. You don't have to be the popular kid in school or the popular person at the party. You don't have to be able to do miracles. Jesus can use us in our weakness. He was effective even in his weakness. But that's also CHALLENGING for us, because sometimes we want to become more popular, or more eloquent, or more powerful, and then we climb the world's ladder while we say, 'Oh, I'll obey Jesus later. Right now, I'm being strategic with my potential. I'll be more effective later.' Jesus will rip that thin veneer of lies right off. There is no such thing as delaying your obedience. That is disobedience.

Now that Paul takes back the word 'power' from Greek culture of exploitative teachers, and returns it to Jesus where it belongs, he reclaims the word 'wisdom' and says that real wisdom comes from Jesus and is in Jesus. In v.6, 'Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature...' But this wisdom is 'not from this age, nor from the rulers of this age.' It belongs to the resurrection future that God has unveiled through the resurrection of Jesus. Paul expands on that in 2:7 – 10.

**Second – You're Acting Like the Politicians Who Killed Jesus: 2:7 – 10a**

The main point in this section is that followers of Jesus are smarter than the rulers of this age. Smarter because they know the future is all about living the love of God in resurrection bodies, and we are investing into that future.

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| <p><sup>7</sup> but we speak God's wisdom<br/>in a mystery,<br/>    the hidden wisdom which God predestined<br/>    before the ages to our glory;<br/>        <sup>8</sup> the wisdom which none of the rulers<br/>        of this age has understood;<br/>            for if they had understood it they<br/>            would not have crucified the Lord of glory;<br/>        <sup>9</sup> but just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen<br/>        and ear has not heard,<br/>        and which have not entered the heart of man,</p> | <p>we speak God's true wisdom<br/><br/>God predestined this wisdom to us<br/>rulers of this age don't understand<br/>they would not have crucified Jesus<br/>men don't understand</p> |
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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, edited by Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1987)

<sup>2</sup> Other places when 'Spirit and power' mean one thing together: Romans 1:4 when Paul says that Jesus was declared Son of God with power by the Spirit raising him from the dead. Also, Paul in Romans 1:16 refers to the preaching of the gospel as the power of God for salvation. Paul regarded the Spirit as accompanying the preached word (as here in 1 Cor.2:13), so 1:16 is another instance where Paul equates the Spirit and power.

all that God has prepared  
for those who love him.'

<sup>10</sup> For to us God revealed them  
through the Spirit.

God has prepared all for us

God revealed them to us  
through the Spirit

Illus: Now what is Paul saying here? How many of you know the Harry Potter story? It's one of my favorite stories ever. In it, the wise mentor Dumbledore tells our hero Harry Potter that the villain, the Dark Lord Voldemort, is actually kind of dumb. Dumbledore says that Lord Voldemort saw everyone and everything through the lens of power. What would increase his power? How would that person increase his power? How would knowing that increase his power? And if it didn't obviously increase his power, he didn't care. Dumbledore says, 'And his knowledge remained woefully incomplete, Harry! That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped.' (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p.709 – 710) It's like if you see people in terms of helping your career. You won't really see certain things, like why he calls his sister every weekend, or why she is passionate about that helping that community, or why Jesus can heal and transform your life into something far better and far greater.

That's Paul's point here. When I first read this, I thought, 'Paul sure goes on a long time about this divisions stuff. How come he didn't wrap it up in chapter 1? He could've just said, *stop it guys*, and then moved on to address other things. What does he gain by continuing the argument in this way?' Now, it's a little more clear to me. It's because a desire for power affects how we learn, how we know things, and how we even decide what's worth knowing. It depends on our posture.

The rulers of this age just wanted power. And this is a caution to us. So how do they look at Jesus? First as a threat to their power! And you might feel like Jesus is a threat to your personal power, too. And second as an opportunity to show their power by rejecting him. And you might feel like rejecting Jesus, or parts of Jesus, shows your personal power. 'Like I'm above other Christians! I can pick and choose what I like about Jesus and leave some stuff behind!' The rulers of this age were just like that. They publicly crucified Jesus to intimidate anyone else who followed him, or even thought like him. And any other Jewish uprisings that took the militant option would definitely be scared off. But Paul says that if they knew who Jesus was – if the Jewish chief priests and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and his whole system really knew who Jesus was – they would have tried to kill him quietly, mysteriously, and throw his body into the ocean, so that when he came back, he would have to prove to people that he had really died. Can you imagine if Jesus came to his followers and said, 'Hey guys, guess where I've been the last few days!' And they say, 'Nawwww, c'mon Jesus. You were dead? We just thought you went away to pray on a private retreat like you sometimes did.' But the rulers played right into Jesus' hands. They wanted to show how powerful they were, so they publicly hung Jesus up on a cross in a place where everyone could see that he died. No doubt, no question about it. So that when he rose from the dead, Jesus could just show up and blow people away. He proved that his vulnerability was more powerful than human power. What seemed like his foolishness was wiser than human wisdom. And what seemed like his public defeat was actually his victory over the corruption of sin within himself. He killed the disease in himself that was killing us, so that in his resurrection, Jesus could give us his healed human nature. Not only that, but through his innocent death, Jesus showed that all the other rulers of the world were unjust. The most ethical community in the world, the Jews, killed Jesus, an innocent man. What did that show about them? And the most just political system in the world, the Romans, didn't even care about evidence and truth in Jesus' case. They just greased the massive wheels of their system with the blood of Jesus, and ground him up. What does that show about them? You see, Jesus is like the basketball player who can run circles around everyone else but when the other team gets enraged, he lets himself get fouled and pushed and hit to show that they are out of control. Now it's clear: Jesus alone is the just judge and the just king. Hasn't everyone else showed that they are unjust?

So Jesus shows us that the quest for power is not the quest for truth, even though they might have said that at first. A quest for power makes you shoot yourself in the foot. If we think that Christian preaching or Christian ministry is just one more way to get people on your side, or to get rich, make people fight for you, and surround yourself with flatterers, you are acting like the rulers of this age. If you want power and worldly success, just look at the people who have the most, and see where it got them. They killed Jesus, publicly. And what do they do to stay in power? Divide humanity up like the Corinthians were saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I am of Apollos'? The rulers of the world

divide people up to keep their power.<sup>3</sup> Who wants power and wisdom like the Corinthians? The rulers do – their own political leaders. And what did the rulers wind up doing with Jesus? Embarrassing themselves. They were like Lord Voldemort in Harry Potter; they chose not to know Jesus or follow him.

Illus: By contrast, the people who are showing a lot of God’s wisdom nowadays are pastors and some Christians in Ferguson, Missouri, black and white, who are trying to bring people together. They are trying to demonstrate the reality of their oneness in Jesus, which flows out of Jesus’ physical, resurrection body. And by doing that, they have become agents of reconciliation: <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/watch/missouri-pastors-unite-ferguson-through-faith-319799363530>. A pastor named Willis Johnson protested with others in the streets, peacefully. He saw an 18 year old young man who had not slept, who was just angry, starting to get into an altercation with the police, and he gave him a gigantic hug, praying, ‘Give him the strength — give us the strength — to be courageous enough not to do what they expect us to do’: <http://www.npr.org/2014/08/14/340422502/ferguson-pastor-this-is-not-a-race-issue-this-is-a-human-issue>. That was really moving.

Illus: This wisdom in Jesus has been around a long time. When Christian faith spread to the African Nubian kingdoms, what is now the Sudan and upper Nile, two warring kings of Nobatia and Makuria came to Jesus at around the same time, reconciled their differences, and united their kingdoms! They developed great literature because they weren’t focused on war. Man, do we need Jesus like that, or what?!?

But is this really a wise way to live? If we follow Jesus into his style of vulnerability, is that wise? Paul’s resounding answer is YES!! Why? Because it is our future!! That’s why there are all these references to time. Notice the rulers ‘of this age, who are passing away’ in v.6 and again in v.8. And that’s why Paul says people in general didn’t know: ‘but just as it is written, ‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.’ It’s not just the rulers of this age. It’s all who deliberately choose to be ignorant of Jesus. Paul sees the present in light of the future which has dawned in Jesus. And what is that future? If I told you, ‘Hey, eat lots of kale and collard greens because it’s good for your personal future because they are super nutritious foods (which is true, by the way),’ you would eat more of them. And if I told you, ‘Farmers are going to grow more kale and collard greens (which I’m guessing is true), and you’ll want your taste buds to adjust so you can like them more,’ you might do that, too. Why? Because it’s about your future, and THE future. Well that’s just an analogy. Jesus has told us our future, he embodies our future, and our future is resurrection with him. His body is resurrected. That means our bodies will be resurrected. And we as his body corporately will live in love and unity because in him there is no jealousy, pride, bitterness, or tendency to compare. He is THE future. So why do we care about unity and reconciliation now? Because we are adjusting our taste buds to that reality, the reality of Jesus.

That’s why back in 1:30, Paul said, ‘Christ [that is, the crucified and resurrected one] became to us wisdom from God.’ What does that mean? In the Jewish tradition, wisdom is practical knowledge boiled down to clever sayings; it’s knowledge you can live by and act on. Kind of like how the phrase YOLO Jesus is a clever saying of an entire worldview that is individualistic and all about you. Jesus is wisdom for us, even though following him looks foolish to others. If we are led by Jesus to be loving and generous and vulnerable and humble, is that foolish or wise? It’s WISE, because God will honor that life in eternity, in the age to come. Jesus burned out of himself everything that was unloving, not generous, not vulnerable, and not humble. And he is adjusting our taste buds to his tastes. So when we meet him face to face, we might say, ‘Lord Jesus, burn away anything left in me that resists you. Any taste for other things, burn it away.’ If we live with Jesus and like Jesus, is it foolish or wise? It looks foolish to people outside of Jesus. But it’s wise! Jesus lived that way, Jesus vindicated his way of life through his resurrection, Jesus will raise us later, and Jesus is our wisdom. It’s not YOLO. It’s Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that whenever Paul speaks of ‘rulers and authorities,’ he is talking about the unity of the church (Eph.1:20 – 23; 6:10 – 20; Col.2:15; Gal.4:8 – 9). Jesus was (and still is) regathering all humanity under his lordship, so he was relativizing all other rulers. This provoked anger and jealousy. By crucifying him in a very public way, the most ethical community in the world (the Jews) and the best judicial system of the time (the Romans) conspired to publicly kill an innocent man. In so doing, they exposed themselves as false to their own ideals. Had they known that this was what they were doing, they would have found some other way to kill him quietly and secretly. Was it possible for the rulers to not crucify Jesus, in 2:8b? No. They would have killed Jesus one way or the other. The issue is not killing Jesus vs. letting Jesus live. The issue is public crucifixion vs. private murder. Crucifixion was public, and that’s the point Paul is making.

And, Paul says, this was God's intention for us the whole time. In the second and second to last points, Paul says this is 'the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory... all that God has prepared for those who love him' (v.7, 9). God always wanted to bring people into His eternal life. That's why he put the Tree of Life in the center of the garden of Eden. It either had the life of God in it, or represented that by the word of God. So people could have become immortal if they ate its fruit (Gen.3:22). That is the 'hidden wisdom that God has predestined before the ages to our glory' (2:7). God always wanted for every person to have that life. When Adam and Eve corrupted human nature, God had to take a long detour to come as Jesus and uncorrupt it. Now you could ask why God took so long to send Jesus. And that is a great question. I have a few thoughts about it, for another time. You can also ask, 'Is this wisdom hidden or revealed?' Paul speaks of it both ways here. That's because Jesus is hidden now in the heavens but he is revealed when we speak about him. That's why Paul is eager to proclaim Jesus, and keep proclaiming him! 'We speak God's wisdom in a mystery' in v.7, in the first part of the chiasm, matched with v.10, in the last part of the chiasm, 'For to us, God revealed them through the Spirit.'

### **Third – This is How We Know Jesus and His Truth: 2:10b – 16**

Now at that point, if this letter was being read to the Corinthian Christians at one of their house church meetings, someone might have piped up and asked, 'But how does Paul know all this? How can he claim that this is true?' Paul anticipates that in v.10b – 16, when he says, 'through the Spirit.' He takes the very last thought and builds it out.

For the Spirit searches all things,  
even the depths of God.

<sup>11</sup> For who among men knows the thoughts of a man  
except the spirit of the man which is in him?

who knows the thoughts of God?  
the Spirit of God

Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

<sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world,  
but the Spirit who is from God,  
so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

Spirit gives us knowledge of God

<sup>13</sup> which things we also speak,

not in words taught by human wisdom,  
but in those taught by the Spirit,

we speak what  
the Spirit teaches

combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

<sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God,  
for they are foolishness to him;  
and he cannot understand them,  
because they are spiritually appraised.

natural man does not understand  
spiritual things

<sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual [of the Spirit] appraises all things,  
yet he himself is appraised by no one.

who knows the mind of the Lord?  
we do [by the Spirit]

<sup>16</sup> For who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct him?  
But we have the mind of Christ.

Now at first this passage was frustrating to me because it sounds like Paul was going totally private and even becoming circular. Imagine this dialogue:

*Corinthians:* How do we know Christian faith is true?

*Paul:* Because the Spirit of God tells me so.

*Corinthians:* How do you know it's the Spirit of God who is speaking to you?

*Paul:* Well, I just know.

And if you could imagine this dialogue:

*Person 1:* I know I'm supposed to marry you.

*Person 2:* How do you know that?

*Person 1:* Because the Spirit of God tells me so.

*Person 2:* How do you know it's the Spirit of God...?

That's not actually what Paul is saying here. He is not talking about private revelation or even personal matters that God could say to you. That's important, and we'll talk about that later on in 1 Corinthians, but that's not what he's talking about here. So HOW has the Spirit spoken in this sense? And WHAT has the Spirit spoken? There are three ways.

First, the Spirit spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament, to declare God's promises. Peter said so in 1 Peter 1:10 – 11: 'As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.' This is why the New Testament is built on the Hebrew Scriptures. Even in this very passage, Paul quotes from Isaiah 40:13 ('Who has known the mind of the Lord?') in 2:16 because that is about God coming to restore Israel from exile, and Paul says that God has come in Jesus to do that. And Paul quoted from Isaiah 64 – 66 as a whole ('Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man'<sup>4</sup>) in 2:9, because that is about God's new heavens and new earth, and Paul is talking about our future resurrection so we can enjoy that new heavens and new earth in bodies that are fully healed and transformed. So the Spirit spoke in such a way that was public, not private. And what the Spirit said in the Hebrew Scriptures was confirmed by Jesus.

Which is the second category: The Spirit has spoken through Jesus. Jesus interpreted himself publicly and taught people publicly. There were no secrets in the sense that one person was given special knowledge. So everything the Spirit said through Jesus could be cross checked. Especially what Jesus said about himself.

And that brings us to the third category: The Spirit has spoken through the apostles, as they repeated Jesus and helped others understand him. Later in 1 Corinthians 7:10, Paul will say that he is explicitly repeating Jesus. 'But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord...' And repeatedly, Paul says that he is handing down what he was given:

- 'And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you *the testimony of God.*' (2:1)
- 'For this reason I have sent to you Timothy...and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, *just as I teach everywhere in every church.* (4:17)
- 'But to the married *I give instructions, not I, but the Lord....*' (7:10)
- 'And so *I direct in all the churches.*' (7:17)
- 'So also *the Lord directed* those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.' (9:14)
- 'To those who are without law, [I become] as without law, though not being without the law of God but under *the law of Christ.* (9:21)
- 'Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to *the traditions*, just as I delivered them to you.' (11:2)
- 'For *I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you*, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread...' (11:23 – 25)
- 'The things which I write to you are *the Lord's commandment.*' (14:37)
- '...Hold fast the word which I preached to you... *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received*, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...' (15:2 – 4)

So when Paul is talking about the Spirit giving him stuff to say, he is referring to *all of this*. Publicly said, publicly written, publicly passed on. Not private, not secret, not individual. The Spirit of God was with the Word of God when God said, 'Let there be light,' and there began light and life on earth. That word echoed throughout the universe, and every angel heard it. So also the Spirit of God was with the Word of God made flesh when he said, 'I am the light of the world' and 'I am the resurrection and the life (Jn.8:12; 11:25), and there began new light and new life on earth. Those words echoed throughout public space, and many people heard it.

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<sup>4</sup> I believe that Paul is taking Isaiah 64 – 66 as a whole and compacting it. In Isa.64:1 – 4, Isaiah longs for the Lord to rend the heavens and come down, doing something as unexpected and wonderful as He did for Israel long ago (64:3 – 4). But Isaiah longs specifically for a 'new heavens and new earth' (65:17; 66:22), which is exactly what Paul has in mind here in 1 Corinthians: resurrection.



This is why the rulers of this age, Roman and especially Jewish, were actually accountable. They heard something. They could connect it to Jesus. But they refused because they were more interested in power. Pontius Pilate said, 'What is truth?' (Jn.18:35) They were like Lord Voldemort, only caring about their own power. That's why Paul says in v.14, 'But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised [or appraised by the Spirit].' The Spirit is WITHIN the content of what was written or spoken. The Spirit of God comes WITH the Word of God, always. That is why receiving the Word of God unleashes God's power within the person, because the Spirit is WITHIN the Word. That is why Paul says in v.13, the center of this chiasm, '...We also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.' That can also be translated, 'Combining thoughts of the Spirit with words of the Spirit.' God can break through to the human mind, and He can share His thoughts with us. THAT IS HOW WE CAN KNOW JESUS, KNOW GOD, AND KNOW THAT GOD WANTS OUR GOOD FOR OUR FUTURE!! THAT'S WHY WHEN WE SPEAK, IT'S NOT JUST US SPEAKING. IT IS GOD HIMSELF. AMAZING!!

Illus: One of the most touching movies of the last few years is The King's Speech. It's about King George III, who was King of Great Britain during World War II. He was a stutterer. He really struggled with making public speeches. It made him nervous, anxious, and he stuttered even more. So he hires a speech therapist named Lionel Logue. And Logue gives him some calming and breathing exercises. But more importantly, he becomes the King's friend. He helps King George understand some painful experiences from his past, to help unravel the stuttering. Then when Hitler rises to power and threatens the U.K., King George gets on the radio. Lionel Logue is right there with him. He's encouraging him, helping him focus, helping him speak. And King George delivers one of the most powerful speeches in history. When I saw that movie, I thought, 'That's like the Spirit of Jesus in us, helping us speak!! The Spirit empowers us, encourages us, helps us deal with our stutters!!' It's not just us speaking. God speaks through us by His Spirit.

#### **Fourth – You Won't Be Able to Understand More Until You Reconcile: 3:1 – 4**

Yet you won't be able to understand more until you reconcile. In fact, truth can be dangerous in the hands of the immature, which is what Paul says in 3:1 – 4:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <sup>3:1</sup> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men,     | <i>you were</i> men of the flesh           |
| but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.                                |  |
| <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk to drink, not solid food;                          | <i>you were</i> not able to receive        |
| for you were not yet able to receive it.  |  |
| Indeed, even now you are not yet able,  |  |
| <sup>3</sup> for you are still fleshly.   | <i>you are still</i> of the flesh          |
| For since there is jealousy and strife among you,                               |  |
| are you not fleshly,  |  |
| and are you not walking like mere men?  | <i>are you not</i> of the flesh, mere men? |
| <sup>4</sup> For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' |  |
| are you not mere men?   | <i>are you not</i> mere men?               |

The progression here goes from you were (3:1), you were (3:2), you are still (3:3a), are you not (3:3b), are you not (3:4). Apparently Paul didn't want to get into a whole lot of things with the Corinthians when he first arrived because they would twist it and use it against each other. He says in you were not men of the Spirit, but of the flesh (3:1), meaning the corruption of sin within human nature – you were governed by that too much. In 3:3a, in the center point, he says, 'you are still fleshly.' And just to make sure they know and we know what he means, he says right away, 'For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly?' (3:3b)

I think it's likely that some of the Corinthians had turned away from Paul because they felt like Apollos or Simon Peter had taught them more. So they're blaming him: 'You only gave us milk. The other apostles gave us real food.' Paul turns that around on them. He says, 'I couldn't give it to you because you couldn't handle it well. Look at what's happening right now!'

If you don't know the love of Jesus and our future hope, you will just use Christian faith as a way to feel superior to other people you don't like: that kid you never liked; your alcoholic father; white supremacists; Muslim radicals. You'll do something like make 'knowledge' into the greatest Christian virtue and look down on other people who

don't 'know' as much. Or you'll make 'power and influence' into the greatest Christian virtue and look down on Christians who are not 'powerful and influential.' That was the sin I committed when I was a camp counselor, as I introduced this topic. That is what I'm always in danger of doing. That is what Jesus started to address in me when I gave my life to him in Mexico.

Here at Rescued, some of us really like theology. But can I speak as one of you? There are times and places for that, especially if you're wrestling with evil in your life and the goodness of God. My interest in theology started when my family started falling apart, *before I was a Christian*. Understanding the character of God is a real need. But we have to be careful. Because if Jesus is worth knowing, and loving, and we believe that he is, then we have to figure out ways to talk about him that are relevant for everyone, even for the person who doesn't love theology per se. When we say that we are about community, and friendship, and reconciliation, it's because Jesus says this is a way for us to grow. He says, 'Let's drop the power pretense, drop the jealousy, drop the strife. Discover what it means to have Jesus in common.'

Also, there are some of us who have been really hurt by someone else. So can I speak as one of you? There are times and places for anger and boundaries and distance. But we can't use Jesus as a way to feel superior to someone else. Because everyone needs Jesus. So when we say that we are on mission, it's not just for other people's benefit. It's also for ours. Jesus says, 'Let's go back and love those people you didn't love that well back then.'

I also want to think about this as a parent. How do we coach our kids to relate to other kids? I know we want to protect them, maybe even from certain other kids. But I think because of the mission of the body of Christ, we need to teach our kids to give other children a hearing. It's complex and the context matters. But fundamentally, I don't think we can just let the cafeteria lunch table dynamics set the tone for how our kids relate to others.

Head knowledge and truth are important, but they can be dangerous for immature Christians. Our maturity with Jesus is always shown ultimately in having friendships that are as healthy as possible. Our maturity is shown by our hope and love. One day, we will reflect truly the one body of Christ. That is the future of our body. That is our hope. Not a flimsy, weak hope, but a strong hope that is just as firm as Jesus' bodily resurrection. Actually, it's rooted in his reality. And if we live in hope, then we will find the strength in him to live in love.