

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

The Belfast built Titanic went down because she hit an iceberg. What the lookout failed to see was bad enough, what he could not see was the huge amount underneath the water. Scientists tell us the biggest part of the iceberg lies under the surface. It may rise one hundred feet above the water, but there could be six times that below.

A bit like God's wisdom, it's comparable to an iceberg. To the unbeliever who sees only the tip, it is intellectually treacherous, it is blindingly unrealistic and it's desperately purposeless. But for those who know Jesus Christ personally, they see below the surface to the heart of God's wisdom. By faith, they perceive the hidden depths of the wisdom of God.

In the verses we're looking at in today's study, Paul shows us the difference between the unbeliever and the believer when it comes to the wisdom of God. We'll discover why the sinner can't plumb the depths of God's wisdom and why the saint is able to understand and appreciate the secrets of God's loving heart.

Paul quickly points out in verse 6 that Christianity is not a pie in the sky religion. It is completely rational and believable, it is potentially life changing. He doesn't want these folks to run away with the crazy idea that God's truth is only for the stupid and non-thinking people in our communities.

It may not be based on man's wisdom per se, but it is rooted in the wisdom of God. The God we're talking about here is a God who can't be fooled, a God who knows all things, a God who is infinite and transcendent, a God who gets it right first time, all the time, a God who never has to second guess himself.

Therefore, when it comes to the question of wisdom, there's a world of difference between man's wisdom and divine wisdom. Man's experience has certain limitations, and drawbacks. Man is focused on the here and now and he often assesses a situation from the grid of his past experience. God, on the other hand, is not

restricted or governed by time, he is outside the bounds of time for he is eternal, and every judgment he makes takes into consideration the entire panoply of events—we need to realise that God keeps his eye on the big picture and he knows how the future will all pan out. We don't!

Man may speculate and he does, man may present a considered case for doing this or that and he may come up with a series of projections for tomorrow—the reality is, he hasn't a clue what will happen fifteen or twenty minutes from now, never mind planning five years down the road. But God does! Man can see so far up the hill, and that's about it; however, God can see all the way over the summit and right down the other side!

When it comes to wisdom, God is light years ahead of modern man. Basically, sinful man is out of his depth, while God is in his element! That's the general drift of Paul's argument in this section in 1 Corinthians 2. More about it after the music break!

MUSIC BREAK

In the space of three verses Paul gives us three viable reasons why non-believers fail to appreciate the wisdom of God. He tells us why they only see the tip of the iceberg. Reason number one is that God's wisdom is a mystery! We read in verse 7 that it is 'God's secret wisdom'. That word 'secret' is the telltale phrase. In other words, you can only understand it if you're in the know.

When we think of a mystery you and I are inclined to think of something which is complex, intertwined, and hard to grasp. It has an air of mystique surrounding it, it's like a code that has to be cracked. But God's wisdom isn't like that at all – it's more of a secret than anything else!

When it comes to secrets, you know as well as I do, if you're on the receiving end, it can be a tough one—however, if you're the one who is privy to the secret, then it's plain sailing. That means, the secret is clear to all those who've been informed, the folks who are in the know. By the same token, it's as clear as mud to those who haven't. So far as they're concerned, you could be talking about

anything for they haven't a clue what you're on about. Yes, it's as murky as that!

The implication is that for non-Christians, God's wisdom is a secret they aren't in on. You can see that from their response if they find themselves in among a group of keen Christians, they are like fish out of water! They don't understand the language, they hear what's being said and they are aware in one sense of what's taking place all around them, but they can't get to the bottom of it—they might as well be on a different planet!

That ties in with Paul's next comment in verse 8 where he says that God's wisdom is not understood by those who are outside the family of God. We read: 'None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' The Greek word Paul uses in the text for 'understood' is the word 'ginosko'. It refers to a knowledge born of deep personal understanding. In other words, you know it because you feel it in your bones. You know it because you've experienced it for yourself. It's not theory, it's experiential. It's not just a head crammed full with God facts, it's a heart that's transformed by the grace of God. There's more to life than knowing all there is to know about God, it's knowing God intimately and personally. It's you and I having and sharing a deep relationship with God. That means it's a wisdom that is born out of a living encounter with God, a wisdom we appreciate because we're on the same wavelength as the all-wise God.

The third point Paul makes in verse 9 is that God's wisdom is not learned. You can't go to school and graduate with a degree in wisdom. It's not like that, at all! There's nothing academic about the wisdom of God. It can't be acquired empirically, it must be secured by the heart through faith. And, as we'll find out after the music break, it's something that is God endowed for we know it because of the Holy Spirit's influence in our lives. That's the gist of Paul's one liner in verse 10.

MUSIC BREAK

Paul's amazing comment in verse 10 is a source of rich comfort to God's people, it has been down through the ages—there will be much in this life that we don't fully comprehend, situations in which we're out of our depth, puzzles we can't unravel, events that just don't make sense—but that doesn't matter, the issue is we have the wisdom of God.

And we can use that wisdom in those circumstances where it is essential to get on with living a life in the twenty first century. It doesn't mean we'll always have an answer to all that life throws at us. That doesn't matter. The key truth is that we'll have a deeper and fuller understanding of God's purpose in all that transpires in life. What I think isn't the issue, what God thinks is of supreme importance.

Even when it comes to sorting out the future, the man next door is hoping for the best, but says Paul in verses 9 and 10, we're on a different level for the Lord reveals it to his children. We may not see it with our eyes, we may not hear it with our ears, we may not think of it in our minds—but God shows it to us in another way, the way of the Spirit. He opens up the way for us to be able to perceive what God is doing today and tomorrow. In that sense, the better we know God and his word, the wiser we'll be!

Paul goes on to remind us that nothing is too hard for the Lord. Oh yes, there will be times when we haven't got much of a clue what's going on – but the Holy Spirit is there to lift the lid and give us an insight into God's overall strategic plan. Because of that unique relationship, it means we have insider knowledge. I reckon that's quite fantastic and truly phenomenal.

Even what Paul calls the 'deep things of God', these are not out of bounds, they're all part of the Holy Spirit's brief and it's his role to give us a greater understanding and appreciation of what makes God tick, as it were. With the Holy Spirit, we can probe into the heart and mind of God and the more we discover about him, the more we'll be enthralled and enraptured with him.

To me, that's what makes the Christian life so exciting. It's a steep learning curve for all of us; however, we have the aid of the Spirit of God to enable us to keep on climbing. He takes us from one vista to another and the view is incredibly beautiful and breathtaking from the top.

There's no point in skimming the surface if we can go deeper and deeper into God – the deeper we go, the better it is! It's all about getting to know God better. Hence Paul's comparison in verse 11 when he asks a question, and draws a conclusion: 'For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.'

In other words, I know me—you think you know me and in one sense you do, but you don't know what's going on right now in the innermost recesses of my heart and mind. I do! The same is true in our relationship with God—the only way we can ever know what is on the heart and mind of God is for us to spend time with him—and the more time we spend in his presence the more we'll become aware of his agenda and aspirations for our lives and our world. That's where the Holy Spirit makes all the difference in the world—we have him living within, the person who doesn't know Jesus doesn't have that relationship. We're in the warmth, they're very much out in the cold.

Again that explains Paul's distinction in verse 12 when he talks about the 'spirit of the world' and the 'Spirit who is from God'. One is man centred, the other is God focused! One is designed to appease the flesh, the other is attracted to the light of Jesus and his precious truth. One is time orientated, the other has its eye on eternity. The spirit of the world is something all of us have, the presence of the Spirit of God is exclusive to everyone who knows God personally. The big question is: do you know Jesus? If you do, you're on to a winner, if you don't you're backing a loser!

MUSIC BREAK

The final few verses in chapter 2 are an echo of what Paul has said already. He amplifies and expands his thinking on these great truths. Basically there are two types of people in today's world—the first group is, there are those who don't know Jesus and, the second group, are those who do know God. The traits in both are significantly different.

The unconverted person lives for the here and now, while the Christian has both eyes focused on the future; the sinner man is earth orientated while the believing person is heaven bound. If you met both in the shopping mall, you'd be hard pushed to tell the difference, until you started talking to them. That's when you'd really know who was who and what was what!

You see, our speech gives us away, the things we talk about say something about us, the things that excite us tell people what it is that motivates us. In other words, a man who is wrapped up in himself and his own tiny world will spend all day talking about me, myself, and I. He'll enjoy it, no doubt, everyone else will be bored to tears! The man whose life is devoted to others will have a different slant to his conversation—he'll be keen to find out more about you because he's interested in you as a real person. Two people with two totally different outlooks on life and people and it's evident from their conversation.

If a man loves the Lord Jesus, he will talk about him, he will talk about the Bible and the doctrines of grace and glory. He may not understand all that he reads in Scripture, but that isn't the issue, the Holy Spirit will reveal it to him as time passes by. But the general drift of his conversation will sooner or later come back to Jesus Christ. And when he's conversing with God in prayer, he'll do it in such a way that it will be patently obvious to those who listen that he knows the person to whom he's speaking. And the better we know the Lord the more easy and fluent will flow the language—we're Spirit taught and we are Spirit led because we're a spiritual people. That's a quick resume of verse 13.

The next verse reinforces that truth for Paul says: 'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.' That simply says, if you don't know Jesus as Lord and Saviour, you are living your life on a different wavelength to the Christian. That man is in the dark, the Christian is in the light; that person is as dead as dead can be, the Christian is very much alive; the non-believer is as blind as a bat in a belfry, the Christian has had his eyes opened by the Holy Spirit. The bottom line, if you want to understand the Bible message, you need to know Jesus; if you want to understand the teaching of Scripture, you need to have a heart relationship with the living God. If you don't and you haven't, then you're out on a limb!

The flip side involves the Christian for, according to Paul in verses 15 and 16, that individual has the edge over everyone else in this world. Number one, they know God, and number two, they know the mind of Jesus Christ. They know God because they've had an experience of his grace in their lives. And they know the mind of Jesus because that's what is revealed in the Bible. It tells us what Jesus thinks about this, that, and the other. And the better acquainted we are with the Bible, the stronger is our relationship with God, and the more aware we are of his plan unfolding in the world. The more we immerse ourselves in the word of God, the more we become like the Son of God and the more we reflect the mind of God in all that we do and say and think.

Paul says quite categorically in his punchline at the end of the chapter that 'we have the mind of Christ'. He reminds us what that entails in the succeeding chapters. If you want a quickie overview of the mind of Jesus and its implications for your life right now, why not take a moment and read Philippians 2. That will give you a refreshing insight into why Jesus did what he did and why he spontaneously reacted in the manner he did on every occasion—you see, his lifestyle was governed by what his Father thought. So should yours and mine!

That's where wisdom comes into the picture. It's different from knowledge. We can acquire a wealth of knowledge about a diverse range of subjects, we can saturate our minds with all kinds of trivia and easily become like a walking encyclopaedia. Yes, we can know a lot! But I know a lot of people who know a lot but they're not the wisest people in the world.

True wisdom isn't based on how much or how little we know, it's rooted in our relationship with God, it's all about knowing him for, when we know him, the Holy Spirit will minister into our hearts enabling us to make wise decisions and right choices in this life.

Paul says to each of us today—let's be wise! Let's give our lives to Jesus Christ, and submit ourselves 24/7 to his sovereign plan for our lives. We're not talking here about putting an old head on young shoulders, no it's not like that at all! I'm talking about a wise man and age doesn't enter into it! The better we know God and the more intimacy we enjoy with the Almighty, the wiser we'll be—we'll not always be conscious of it, but the folks around us will see it a mile away!

I'll say it again: be wise!