

God's Spirit and Wisdom | 1 Cor 2:1-12; Mathew 5:13-20 | LUMC | Feb 5, 2023.

Dear Church family and friends: in the last two weeks Paul enlightened us on the effect of the Greeks' desire to fit God into their human wisdom-culture, and the Jews' desire to manipulate God to show signs-culture so to believe. These ancient humans' reverence for their wisdom and signs affected their faith in God through the person of their savior, Jesus Christ. I wonder if modern believers take note on how human-made culture affects faith.

Today Paul effortlessly compares and explains how the human spirit and human wisdom are different from God's spirit and God's wisdom. Paul reminds us God's Spirit and God's wisdom are opposite of the human spirit and human wisdom.

The topic of God's Spirit and wisdom occupy much of his sermon. After explaining his understanding of God's spirit and God's wisdom, Paul says both aspects influence his faith and ministry.

In this passage Paul appears a totally different person from how the early Christ-followers knew him. Paul (also called Saul) in his human spirit and human wisdom was heartless, the worst persecutor of the early Christians. Paul was proud of his Jewish culture and training, a professional academician equivalent of today's PhD. Here, Paul is being completely humbled and directed by God's spirit and God's wisdom. Paul's sermon to the Corinthians shows how someone under God's wisdom and spirit must behave. A God-led person must give their knowledge of God's ministry of the cross first place. We are called to knowing Jesus personally and his work. Jesus never labored to impress people or attract them through oratory or miracles. He was sincere and his only goal was to evangelize the human soul.

Paul also starts his sermon by informing us the extent that God's spirit and wisdom has humbled him, and he resists letting it go to his head, or attracting or imposing his views on others. He is doing God's ministry 'in fear and trembling'. We know Paul was deeply versed in Roman, Greek, and Jewish languages. He was also so well-versed in the old Jewish terminologies, but he restrained himself from using difficult theological words. He used what we call today, the "common street language" in his sermons, or simply wrote letters to reach everyone, elite and the common people alike. The elite people would be impressed with his simplicity despite his complex education and upbringing. This is self-awareness informing us that St Paul was fully influenced by God in his work and his thought process. Paul shuns self-glory meant for God, and allows God to receive the glory.

Indeed, old Saul was changed into new Paul defining himself as an earthen vessel God uses for God's glory, not Paul's pride. This means God can use even the weakest of humans to let God be known to others. Jesus also confirmed that even stones can worship and glorify God, while humans remain stubborn. He was "batting for God" and promoting God's glory. In our prayers, modern-day people can relinquish their human wisdom and human spirit to allow God to use them even in their

weakness. At the point when a person confesses to God saying, “I really do not know how to do this”, God will show up to give directions to those who truly love God.

I hope I am not wrong to say that in modern times, Christians are bombarded with emotional and ‘feel good’ sermons. St Paul’s sermons and letters do not indicate influence from human wisdom or spirit. St Paul’s preaching, the writings and speeches elsewhere use persuasive words, being influenced not by human wisdom, but by the Spirit and power of God. Most scholars are of the opinion that St Paul’s way of presenting himself through speeches, preaching, and writing would not have won an oratorical contest. Nevertheless, Paul’s persuasion led many people to repentance, and followed Christ, the best of all rewards a believer can achieve while alive.

The hidden wisdom of God is the teaching of the Good News that inclusively appeals to people of all cultures. In Christ the Jew and the gentile are one—your culture and mine are secondary to God’s teaching, and you and I are both partakers of God’s blessings. We meet at the holy communion table, we hear a sermon on Christ dying for our salvation, and we are called to repentance and live a life of the cross.

I pay attention in my sermon, my spiritual life, and my spiritual actions to make sure I am not allowing my human influence to overwhelm me, but staying directed by God. God is to receive the glory, not me. I point myself and other believers to the cross to learn the mystery of God’s truth that remains hidden to unbelievers. Like St Paul I desire those hearing me to develop a desire toward learning more of the mystery and truth of the God that makes one global community.

St Mathew moves us to Christian practical living. Mathew heard Jesus define the life of a saved believer. Jesus compares those who genuinely follow him as the light and the salt of the earth. Why did Jesus use the image of light? Because light shines in the darkness, and there is no dark so dense that light cannot overcome. The light helps us to see, and to define clearly what we see. You probably know someone without the ability to see. When I did sign language lessons, I became aware that even those without sight or hearing, God reveals to them what is happening around them. So seeing is cardinal to avoiding danger, mistaking things, and being careful to act on what we see.

Therefore, Jesus uses light to differentiate those who are living in him from those away from him. Sighted people know the difference between sin and sinless—they use their ability to help others and not take advantage of them.

There once was a blind man seated at the corner of a street. Kind people gave him money but thieves stole the money. These thieves misused their eyes to steal from the blind beggar. Finally, a group of kind people agreed to take turns for few days to apprehend thieves; they sat at a distance to watch that no one stole from the beggar. Jesus can use you and me with the gift of physical and spiritual sight to do ministry in different ways.

While salt makes food tasty, it also preserves food. Its powerful ingredients can break down food and preserve other things. This means the unchristian can detect genuine Christians through their use of welcoming words, a smiling face, a calm demeanor and stretched-out hands sharing their love in various ways.

I can count the many times I used my gift of light and salt to advance the reign of God. One time a man passed me in a rush; he did not even acknowledge me. I got out of his way, recognizing his need to run. A few meters from me, he dropped his wallet but kept on. I picked it, called to him loudly, "Hey you dropped your wallet", but he did not hear me. I had to run after him and get in front of him holding the wallet. He appeared surprised, took his wallet, opened it and found his belongs intact. He thanked me, then hurried on his way. Someone may wonder and ask why did I bother to help this guy; what motivated me to share his burden?

It's my faith.

I was being the light and the salt as Christ mandates me. I did not allow human spirit and human wisdom that is always looking for self-gain, always desiring to criticize others, to be my guide. The human spirit is inward looking to preserve self-avowed principles; it loves to be "all about me". I allowed God's wisdom and God's Spirit voice saying, "I am not stealing; with God I am better than this" to influence me.

Amen