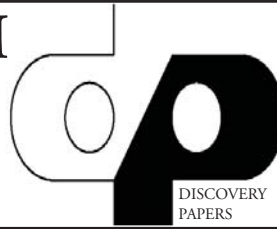


GOD'S SECRET WISDOM

SERIES: MOVING ON TO MATURITY



Catalog No. 20120115
Corinthians 2:6-16
3rd Message
Steve Zeisler
January 15, 2012

A recent Stanford alumni magazine noted that Meyer Library is scheduled for demolition. It was erected and then dedicated a few months before I entered school in the fall of 1967. In fact, the structure was a point of pride during freshman orientation that year—a state of the art building set aside to foster undergraduate education. It is now outdated, gone from a grand opening to obsolescence in four and a half decades. This is a little unsettling. I don't feel like I've grown so old.

We are returning here to a study of 1 Corinthians. At the end of chapter 1 Paul sets forth a series of contrasts: learning to discern wisdom from foolishness and respecting what is truly powerful instead of that which only appears to be. In the final analysis these questions bring us to the test of time. What lasts and what does not? Is there something greater than the wisdom of this age (a library soon to become obsolete)? The Christian gospel, centered on Jesus' sacrifice, is the enduring message even though it ministers to the needy; it is spoken by those without status and appears foolish in the world. This gospel is worthy of our allegiance. Recalling our previous study, 2:2 we read, "I (Paul) resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Before we move on let me make an observation about the phrase, 'resolved to know nothing.' It is not describing a fear of new ideas or an unwillingness to listen to helpful criticism. It is not a rejection of humble scholarship or avoidance of new wineskins. Paul's firm resolution, however, is a commitment to use the intellectual abilities given to us by God to exalt the Savior who died for us. He refuses to be captivated by fashionable concepts that dishonor Christ. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

With that in mind let's turn to verse 6 of Chapter 2. Having rejected the wisdom of the world, Paul now turns to 'God's secret wisdom.'

1 Corinthians 2:6-9:

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God

destined for our glory before time began. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹However, as it is written:

**"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"—**

Again it is clear that human pride is the barrier to gifts God would give. 'The mature' who benefit from secrets made known are not a special class of people (recall God's preference for 'lowly things,' 1:28). The ones who receive beautiful and hidden insights are men and women who have stopped competing for the high place (rulers of this age); have stopped parroting the 'intellectual correctness' of the moment (wisdom of this age).

Certainly 'the mature' are not a separate circle of advanced level Christians—this would contradict everything the apostle has been saying in this letter. The hidden things of God are made known to anyone who gives up self promotion, and chooses instead to worship Jesus and serve others.

Paul wrote of his contemporaries, 'the wisdom of this age and the rulers of this age are coming to nothing.' And the same terrible calculation that made Jesus' execution seem proper in the first century has resurfaced in every generation since. It is no different today. All who turn from the wisdom of God will refuse the claims of Jesus and then, in effect, join the throng that shouts, 'crucify him.'

Though God's wisdom is available to all, it is accessed only through relationship. We can't learn the wisdom of God without the presence of God. We read in Isaiah 55:8-9, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth so my ways are higher than yours and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." The secret things are achingly beautiful and wondrous, but no one has engaged the thoughts of God without repentance, conversion, and the indwelling of the Spirit—as verse 2:10 makes clear.

1 Corinthians 2:10-13:

¹⁰but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹For 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. ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Verse 13 can be misleading to modern readers. In our day the word 'spiritual' frequently connotes something ethereal or magical. In modern parlance, a spiritual person is often someone who stares off in the distance and eats peculiar food. But here 'spiritual' just means that a statement, person, or event is related to the Spirit. A spiritual person is one who hears and obeys, loves and trusts the words and the presence of the Spirit of God.

Do you ever wish your life had a narrator? Most fiction is written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who can offer helpful explanations—'though the hero spoke harshly, his heart was filled with love.' My motives are often at odds with my actions and I long for someone to make sense of my behavior to me and to others. 'There's a reason why I was late.' or 'I sometimes use anger as a cover for fear.' In addition to explaining hidden motives, a story's narrator can tell of events in the wider world that are unknown to the central character. Or they can leap forward in time with a reassurance about final outcomes.

The work of the Holy Spirit is similar to a novel's narrator. He searches the deep things of God and makes known the thinking of both men and God. By the Spirit we know the heart of the Father not just the facts about him.

Two things in particular. First, we learn to understand the glorious nature of a gift we have already received (v. 12). This gift is salvation and all its benefits—which become clearer and more meaningful as the Spirit teaches to understand who we are in Christ. Second, (v. 13) we read of 'words taught by the Spirit' (to the apostles) which are preserved for us in the books of the New Testament. The divine Narrator used human minds and vocabularies to articulate and then preserve 'spiritual truths.'

1 Corinthians 2:14-16:

¹⁴The 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. ¹⁵The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

¹⁶"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?"

But we have the mind of Christ.

Those who refuse to hear the voice of the Spirit, who reject the message of a crucified Messiah, will claim that such ideas are foolish. It is inevitable that anyone who does believe will then be labeled a fool or worse. Paul's counsel in v. 15 is to accept what is inevitable and live with the consequences (rejection) rather than be 'subject to any man's judgement.' We have the privilege of knowing the thoughts of God and therefore of knowing the truest things about ourselves. No other opinion matters.

The Bible exists as a work of God's Spirit and he continues to teach its deep insights to all who will listen. This is wisdom that leads to maturity, the antithesis of worldly philosophies and human pride. The truths of the gospel are enduring.

Below is a statement that was written at the time when the Meyer Library was dedicated in December, 1966.

The J. Henry Meyer Memorial Library will be a home for the books the donors so respect, and a place where coming generations will draw upon the wisdom of the past. And it will serve to remind all men of an early and distinguished Californian.

Good intentions, surely, but misguided nonetheless. The building will barely survive to serve even one full generation (not generations to come). And the number of men or women who were ever reminded by the building of J. Henry Meyer (distinguished Californian, 1855-1921) is miniscule. Buildings get torn down and books of all sorts come and go. The word of the Lord lasts forever.