

Whose Influence Are You Living Under? **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**

The thing that always strikes me about Palm Sunday is how a whole bunch of people gathered together to worship Jesus and proclaim him as their king on Sunday, but then, throughout the days that followed, proceeded to quickly turn away from him. They hailed him as the Messiah, but he didn't do what they wanted him to do. They wanted him to become king, take over their government, free them from oppression, exalt Israel above all nations and usher in an everlasting Kingdom. But when he didn't do that, they didn't want to have anything to do with him. The one they had been looking for was right there in front of them, but they couldn't even recognize him. How is that possible? How could the chosen people of God, to whom God revealed himself and gave the Scriptures, be wrong about the Messiah?

We've been studying the book of 1st Corinthians and we've seen that the Christians in the church of Corinth were fighting and arguing with one another because of differences in who their favorite preachers were. How is it possible that Christians could act like that? They were all part of the same church family and following the same Lord – how could they be fighting and arguing so much among themselves?

We've been through a tumultuous year and we've seen Christians fighting and arguing with one another and strongly disagreeing with one another about how to respond to all the different things that have been happening. Christians who were friends a year ago now can't even worship together in the same church. How is it possible for people who are following the same Savior and reading the same Bible to have such differing opinions and so much division?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul explains what he sees happening in the Church of Corinth that was leading to the division, and in chapter 2 he identifies the key to the problem. It's the same thing I think was happening among the Jews on Palm Sunday, and the same thing I see going on in the American church today. It's a pervasive problem among American Christians that I think has been exposed this past year through everything that's happened. It's a problem that each of us are susceptible to and need to see and avoid if the Lord reveals it in our lives.

We started studying 1 Corinthians chapter 2 last week where Paul explained that when he first went to Corinth to preach the gospel, he purposefully didn't use lofty speech or wisdom. He didn't want his speaking ability to be the reason people turned to Jesus because he didn't want anyone's faith to rest on human wisdom, but the power of God. So he kept his message and delivery simple and straightforward – Christ and him crucified – and he didn't go beyond that. But when it came to teaching people who had become believers, he took a different approach, and that's what he writes about next.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-8.

⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

So, among the believers, or the “mature,” Paul did impart wisdom. In other words, he went beyond the basic message of Christ crucified. He went from feeding them milk to solid food. But it was a certain kind of wisdom. He makes it clear that it's not the wisdom of the world – the popular wisdom of that time that was circulating among the debaters, philosophers, and rulers they were familiar with. The wisdom that he and his team imparted was a “secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.”

By using that kind of wording, we know based on other NT writings, that he's talking about the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ that was revealed through his life, death, and resurrection. The fullness of God's wisdom in the gospel of Jesus was decreed by God before history began, and it was foretold and foreshadowed in the Old Testament, but it was kept hidden by God until Jesus was revealed. Once that happened, the veil was lifted, and the pieces all fell into place. Jesus was the key to understanding what God had been up to all along, so when he came, died, and rose again, the wisdom of God was revealed.

Paul points out that this wisdom didn't come from and wasn't understood by any of the earthly rulers of that time, which is why they crucified Jesus. Who Jesus was and what he was doing didn't make any sense to them. They were spiritually blind and darkened in their understanding, so instead of seeing Jesus for who he

was, they saw him as a problem, and killed him. In their wisdom, they saw Jesus as someone to get out of the way, not the one who would fulfill the eternal purposes of God. They couldn't understand God's wisdom.

So the principle Paul begins to establish in these verses is that the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God are completely different. They are separate from each other and don't mix. They're like oil and water. God's wisdom doesn't make sense to worldly wisdom. It can't come from it and isn't combined with it in some way. Paul points out why in the next few verses as he talks about where wisdom comes from and where it does not.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-13

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Paul makes it clear again that the source of the wisdom he and his team imparted to believers didn't come from any human being. He points out in the prophecy he quotes in verse 9, that God's wisdom couldn't be seen, heard, or imagined with human faculties. What Paul believed didn't come from the human mind. The source, he says in verse 10, was God himself. God revealed wisdom to him by his Spirit.

And for Paul it was a powerful revelation. Paul was on the leading edge of the first people who understood the wisdom of God. He didn't live with Jesus for three years like the disciples did, so God actually gave him visions and revelations so he could understand it in its fullness. In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul writes: *"For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."* That happened in the early years after he was born again. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 he writes: *"I will go on to visions*

and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.”

God chose to reveal the fullness of his wisdom in Christ directly to Paul – even things beyond what Paul ever wrote or tried to explain. He didn’t learn it from any pastor or church leader, or philosopher or thinker, he learned it from the Holy Spirit. And in verses 10-13 he clarifies how the Holy Spirit reveals that wisdom – not just to Paul, but to every believer. The Holy Spirit is God, therefore he searches and knows the deep things of God, just like the spirit of a person searches and knows the deep things about them.

The Holy Spirit knows things about God that no human can comprehend on their own. But when a person is born again and believes, the Holy Spirit is given to them, to dwell in them, so that the believer is able to understand the deep things of God that God has now freely given us. So the believer is able to understand the wisdom of God because of the presence of his Spirit inside us. And because of that, Paul and his team would impart the wisdom of God to believers, using words and truths not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit of God. They were interpreting spiritual truths to those who were spiritual.

That’s how the Holy Spirit works to empower the believer to understand the wisdom of God that cannot be understood in any other way. The wisdom of God comes from the Spirit of God and not from human wisdom. So the reason the world doesn’t understand God’s wisdom is that it only comes through and is understood by the Spirit living in us. Those without the Spirit cannot understand it. And that’s what Paul points out next.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

So, someone who does not have the Spirit – the natural person – can't understand God's wisdom because they don't have the Spirit in them to be able to discern the things of God. They can't understand it and they have no ability or right to impart wisdom to the believer or to judge them. The believer, or spiritual person, is able to judge all things because of God's Spirit inside them, but they cannot be judged by the unbeliever who does not have the ability to comprehend the wisdom of God.

Paul writes these things to prepare them for his stern rebuke in the beginning of chapter 3. The problem he saw in the church at Corinth was that the believers were not behaving according to the wisdom of God that should have been influencing their behavior. Instead, they were behaving according to human wisdom. Paul points out that they were behaving in a fleshly and human way, not in a spiritual way. The influence of the wisdom of the world was affecting their perspectives and behavior. They were listening to worldly wisdom, both from outside sources and from within their own minds instead of putting that aside and listening to the voice of the Spirit and the wisdom of God. If they had been living according to the Spirit, they would not have been doing what they were doing – siding with their favorite preachers and arguing amongst themselves.

They had been influenced by and were living according to human wisdom. That's the key to understanding their problem. And it's the same key to understanding the problem of the Jews on Palm Sunday and the Christians in the American church.

Consider the Jews on Palm Sunday who celebrated Jesus for who they thought he was going to be only to reject him a few days later for who he actually was. How is it possible that they were so far off in their expectations of Jesus? It is because their thinking and their perspective had been influenced by worldly wisdom. They weren't operating according to the Spirit; they were operating according to the flesh. That's why they wanted Jesus to set up a political and earthly kingdom, and why they couldn't even recognize him as their Messiah when he was standing right in front of them.

Now consider us – American Christians in 2021.... How is it possible that we who have the same Bibles and are supposed to be worshipping the same Jesus have ended up with such different perspectives on what is going on in our world today?

How is it possible that we think so differently about how we as Christians should be responding to what's happening that we are now opposed to each other and arguing and fighting? I believe it is because we have been deeply influenced by human and worldly wisdom.

We have been looking at things the way that CNN or Fox News or NPR or Talk Radio has been teaching us to look at them. We have been believing the newsfeed on our phones that has been purposefully designed to give us information to fit our point of view. We have been learning how to behave and respond and what to believe from our politicians and governing officials or from politically biased preachers and teachers who are misusing the Bible. We have been listening to and reading articles, blogs, posts, and clips filled with human reasoning and imagination.

And the result is that many Christians are not following the Jesus of the Bible anymore. We each have our own version that fits with our point of view. If Jesus were to appear in our midst today and show us the way he wants us to go, I believe many American Christians would turn away from him like the Jews did on Palm Sunday.

There's a chance you might be thinking that I'm only talking about the Christians who disagree with you. And if you're thinking that way right now, you could be missing the whole point. The point is that each of us is susceptible to being influenced by human and worldly wisdom – without knowing it – and we could be the problem.

So I ask each of us that makes up the East Lincoln family to search our hearts. Who have you been listening to? Where has your perspective come from? What sources have you allowed to shape your thinking and behavior? The spiritual person judges all things... ALL things... Even the things you hear from people and sources you've always relied on. Maybe they're leading you astray and away from Jesus. Maybe they're trapped in human wisdom and don't even know it and they're passing it on to you.

May the Holy Spirit give us eyes to see what he sees about what's really happening in our world. May he give us hearts that are willing to lay our

perspectives down before him so he can show us where we've been wrong and then give us the humility to repent and change.

I encourage you to take a news and information fast for this next week. If you're always tuning in in your phone and TV to what's going on in the world, try tuning it out for a week. Shut off all the outside influences – even the Christians ones – and to seek input only through Scripture and time in prayer. This is Holy Week – a wonderful week to focus on Jesus and hear from him. So turn off the news, don't look at your newsfeed, don't scroll through Facebook, turn off the TV and radio and spend time in God's Word listening to him instead.

May we not be known like the Jews on Palm Sunday or the Christians in Corinth. But may we be known as a people who knew the wisdom of God and lived according to it.