

Study 4. 1 Cor 2:6-16

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God's Spirit is the only way we can know about God and his plans for us

What's a random piece of trivia about you that not everyone in the group may know?

If you have time you can play "two truths and a lie", where each member says three things about themselves, one of which is untrue, and the rest of the group has to guess which is which. Just don't be too good at it or it may harm your credibility.

Observation and interpretation

You may remember that back in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 Paul set up two types of wisdom - the wisdom of this world, and God's wisdom.

- What does Paul mean by "wisdom" here?
- What are the two types of "wisdom" Paul is contrasting? How do they differ?

Now have a read of 1 Corinthians 2:6-10.

- Who are the "rulers of this age" (verse 6), and why is their wisdom coming to nothing (verse 6)?
- How do we *know* that God's wisdom is really wise and the world's wisdom is really foolish?
- How is it possible to know anything about God and his plans? (Are we just smarter than the others?)
- What is the advantage in choosing the right wisdom?

Paul here is playing with words from the weird and wonderful world of Greek/Roman religions and cults, which were very popular in Corinth. The word "mysterion" normally referred to secret teachings, customs and ceremonies which the members of these strange religions kept secret from people who were not part of the club. But here Paul uses it for God's secret plan for the final salvation of the world which has only just been revealed by God to his people by the Spirit.

The "rulers of this age" were responsible for crucifying Jesus (verse 8). They are not only the individuals who ordered his execution (Pilate, Herod, the Jewish leaders) but "the world's organized opposition to God's wisdom" as well as "the pernicious spiritual forces behind them." (Scroggs & Bruce, cited in Ciampa and Rosner, 125)

The quotation in verse 9 is interesting, because it's not at all clear where he is quoting from. The closest thing in the Old Testament as we have it is Isaiah 64:4, which is the same sort of

idea: you can't know anything about God unless he reveals it to you.

Read verses 10-16

- What is the point of Paul's analogy in verse 11.
- Why do some people accept this message as from God, while others think it's stupid?
- Why is the Spirit uniquely able to reveal to us who God is?
- Who are the "we" in verses 10 and 16 - are they the same "we" or different groups?

Application / Implications

What is God's plan for you? How do you know?

Think about where you fit in this picture. If you had to use one word to describe how you feel what would it be?

Many strands in philosophy is very sceptical of our ability to know much less communicate anything about God. Isn't God a mystery?

Doesn't this passage encourage us to be arrogant about our "wisdom", as if everyone else is wrong and we are right? Shouldn't we be more humble?

How does this passage fit with your own experience of either sharing or hearing the gospel message?

Is it right for God to condemn the rulers of the world if they have not received the Spirit? (For that matter, is it right for anyone to be judged for rejecting Christ if they don't have the Spirit?)

This touches on God's work verses human responsibility. Generally the Bible presents them not as "versus" at all, but as two compatible realities. God reveals things to us in a way that changes our perspective on Christ, but in a way that doesn't compromise our humanity (including our ability to make morally responsible decisions). He's clever like that.

In fact, the Spirit restores our humanity - it wasn't God's fault that the rulers of this age couldn't recognise Christ, it was theirs! They were so twisted by their own sin, they mistook Christ's humility for pathetic weakness. Their fear and envy and hate meant they didn't want to understand what God was doing. They have already brought themselves under God's righteous justice long before the Spirit does (or doesn't) get involved.

And yet, for reasons that should blow our minds, he has mercy on some through his Spirit. Take Paul - he's on the way to exterminate the early church, and then Jesus turns his life around on the road to Damascus. In the process Paul doesn't become a robot; he becomes a better human.

This is a great mystery, but I sometimes think of it in terms of great art: God's wisdom is like a beautiful painting which makes us see the world differently, and recognise beauty we had been unable (or unwilling) to see before.

Prayer ideas

Give out post-it notes and get everyone to write things on it:

- The name of a friend
- The name of a neighbour or person you live with
- The name of a colleague or family member
- A place where you might meet someone you don't know yet

Spend some time praying for them, in light of what Paul tells us about wisdom and unwisdom.