

God's Wisdom

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

If someone hurts your feelings by the words they speak it can bruise your soul and it can be difficult to know how to respond. The Book of Proverbs says that rash language cuts and maims and is like the piercing of a sword.

A joke is told at a party about overweight people. You are overweight. You hear the joke and smile politely while your heart sinks. Someone chooses to wash your dirty laundry in public. "Francis, is it true that you and Phillip are separated?" You have a serious illness and someone reacts by thoughtlessly saying they know of at least half a dozen people who have died from that disease.

Insensitive comments. Thoughts that should have remained thoughts. Feelings that have not business being expressed. Opinions carelessly tossed like a grenade into the crowd.

When you start to think about insensitive slurs, you realize that they come from an infamous family whose father has bred generations of pain. His name? Callousness. His children? Disregard, Disrespect and Disappointment. These three have combined to poison countless relationships and break innumerable hearts. Listed among their weapons are Satan's cruelest artillery: Gossip, accusations, resentment, impatience, venomous jibes and words spoken when drunk or high on drugs.

For those of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ we cannot afford the luxury of idol words. This is because our lives are to be shaped by God's wisdom. This wisdom is to govern our lives so that the words we speak reflect the one in whom we have placed our faith. That verse from Proverbs that I quoted contrasts the fool, whose language is like a piercing sword, with the one who is wise. Of the wise Proverbs says "There is healing in the words of the wise". When you put the verse together it read "Rash language cuts and maims but there is healing in the words of the wise."

How do you use your words? Are they like a sword that cut people down or are they like a healing balm that renew and restore others?

The Christians in Corinth showed that they too were descendents of Callousness and

were of the bloodline of Disregard, Disrespect and Disappointment. Just read below the surface of this letter and see the way the Corinthians were insensitive and careless in how they spoke and treated one another. Their swords were often flashing. Paul wants them to see that when we have God's wisdom we are not to treat each other in this way.

In the passage read today Paul teaches us that we have no wisdom of our own, but we are wise only as we look to the Cross of Jesus Christ for our power and wisdom. We look to the Cross because it is there we find:

- wisdom that enlightens,
- wisdom that is eternal
- and wisdom that is external.

As we better understand these three facets of God's wisdom we will be more careful in how we use our words because the Cross of Jesus will overshadow every area of how we live our lives in the world.

God's Wisdom enlightens

In this passage Paul teaches us that God's wisdom enlightens our understanding of how we are to live in the present world. At verse 6 he writes "among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish" What does Paul mean by this? Paul is contrasting two groups here. The mature are those who are Christians. Those who follow the wisdom of this age are those who do not know Christ. They reject the message of the Cross and so spurn the wisdom we receive from God. By referring to Christians as the mature Paul is speaking to all those who have consciously accepted the message of the cross and are growing to maturity in Christ. This happens as we are nurtured in the faith and thus understand the full implications of the Cross for our lives.

In other words the theology of the Cross, our belief, will influence our ethics, the way we live. Paul in speaking of God's wisdom in this verse is referring to God's way of saving the world. When we are enlightened by this wisdom it influences the way we see other people. Perhaps you can think of experiences in your life where when you

were not a Christian your behaviour was very different from what it is now that you are a Christian. You have disowned your family ties with callousness and his offspring and are growing to see other people from the perspective of the Cross. Indeed you can you that as you examine your words that you are less inclined to use rash words that cut down other people and use your language to promote the health of others.

God's Wisdom is eternal

Not only is God's wisdom enlightening, Paul goes on to say that it is also eternal. In verse 7 he writes "But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory." What Paul is getting at in this verse is the understanding that even though the concept of a crucified Messiah is prophesied in the Old Testament this was not clearly understood in either Old Testament times or in Paul's day by those who rejected Jesus. If it had been understood Paul points out in verse 8 "None of the rulers of this age would have crucified the Lord of glory."

At verse 7 Paul has this striking phrase "God's wisdom was decreed before the ages for our glory" A decree is defined in the Webster Dictionary as i) A formal order determining what is to be done and ii) A foreordaining, eternal purpose of God". So when Paul says that God's wisdom was decreed before the ages he wants us to understand that God had the Cross in mind before he even made us. He realized that by giving us the freedom to make choices we might use that freedom in ways that diminish and devalue God, ourselves and others. Yet God knew that the only wisdom that could restore those who misused the freedom he entrusted to us was a wisdom centred in the Cross. So you see the way of the Cross was in the very heart of God before he had created anything.

And why did he do it. Was it for his glory. No, Paul says it is for our glory. God looks at us in a way that is beyond all we can ask or imagine. This word glory is a word that looks at what we will one day fully be. It is a word that helps us to understand that God's plan for us and for his whole creation will one day be fully realized. It includes both the resurrection of the body, which will be a body of glory and the renewal of the universe.

In a wonderful passage that comes later in 1 Corinthians Paul talks about both the body of glory and the renewal of the universe this way.

"If you look at the world in which we live you will notice that the variety of bodies is stunning – humans, animals, birds, fish – each unprecedented in its form. You get a hint at the diversity of resurrection glory by looking at the diversity of bodies not only on earth but in the skies – sun, moon, stars – all these varieties of beauty and brightness. And we are only looking at pre-resurrection bodies – who can imagine what the resurrection bodies will be like!"

We are therefore careful in how we use our words not only because we are enlightened by God's wisdom but also because we have an eternal perspective on our lives that understands we will one day be participants in God's restored and glorified creation. A creation where callousness, disregard, disrespect and disappointment will have no place.

God's Wisdom is external

Such wisdom is not something we humans could ever imagine. It is external from ourselves, revealed to us by God, the third thing Paul says to us about God's wisdom.

God's secret wisdom can only be known by revelation. All human beings if left to themselves, are ignorant of God's will and purpose. Paul insists on this in verse 9 which is a loose quotation of Isaiah 64.4. God's wisdom is something that no eye has seen (it is invisible), no ear has heard (it is inaudible) and no mind has conceived (it is inconceivable). It is altogether beyond the reach of human eyes ears and minds. It cannot be grasped by scientific exploration or by the artistic imagination. It is absolutely unattainable by our little, finite, fallen and fallible minds. It can only be known if God should choose to make it known, which is exactly what God has done by his Spirit.

We have in these verses insight into a key biblical doctrine. What we call revelation. The necessity of revelation insists that the human mind capable though it is of remarkable achievements in the empirical sciences, flounders helplessly out of its depth when it is seeking God

The Old Testament equivalent to 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 is Isaiah 55:8-9, in which God says

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The mind of God is as much higher than our minds as the heavens are higher than the earth, which is infinity. There is no ladder by which we can climb to the infinite mind of God. So how can we know his mind? The answer is that we cannot if he remains silent. Let me use the following illustration.

What am I thinking about now as I stop speaking to you?

I'll tell you. I am picturing in my mind the Turkey Dinner I will enjoy later on today, with apple and pumpkin pie to follow for dessert. You had no idea what was going on in my mind. Now, you know exactly what I am thinking because I am clothing the thoughts of my mind with the words of my mouth. If, we cannot read human minds unless we speak or write, how much less can we read God's mind unless he speaks or writes? But God has spoken. Listen to what Paul writes at verse 10 "these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit;" The word "us" used in the Greek makes it clear that this does not refer to all Christian people, for we are not all recipients of direct divine revelation. It must refer to the Apostles, to Paul himself and by extension to his fellow apostles. In this passage God is the author of revelation, the Spirit is the agent of revelation and the apostles are its recipients.

As those who are growing in Christ we are thankful to God that he has revealed through the Cross the wisdom which the world does not know. For all who receive his external and eternal wisdom we are enlightened to live our lives in ways that treat God, ourselves and others with the utmost of respect because we are wanting to be among those whom Paul call the mature. And as Proverbs says there is healing in the words of the wise. Why? Because the wisdom of the mature is Christ focused and centred on the Cross, source of all true wisdom.