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2/6/05

## 1 Corinthians 2:6-14 “How to Know the Truth about God”

Intro. I want to ask you some important questions. Is there a God? If so, what is He like? Is there an answer to human suffering? Is there an answer to bad human behavior? Is there a divine standard for right behavior? What happens to you when you die? Is there a heaven? How can we go there?

Where do you look for answers to the big questions of life? Do you look to the best-sellers at the bookstore? Do you channel surf your TV, looking for the right expert who can answer your questions? Do you look to your friends for answers? Do you think the political leaders have the answers to the big problems we face? Do you think the professors in our universities have the answers regarding where we came from, and where we are going?

Even though the Corinthians had turned to Christ and believed in Him as their Savior, they were still enamored with Greek philosophy and the other experts of their day. They were having all kinds of problems because they were looking in the wrong places for answers to the problems of life.

This morning I want to explain to you why human wisdom is the wrong source to find the answers to the big questions of life. Then I want to show you that God is the source of true wisdom. He has the answers to the big questions of life. And I will show you how God transfers His wisdom to us.

So I want to start out this morning by encouraging you to:

### I. REJECT NATURAL WISDOM REGARDING LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS

There are two types of wisdom that compete for men's souls: divine wisdom, and “the wisdom of this age,” that is, worldly wisdom. Or v.13 refers to “man's wisdom” in contrast to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Which will you choose? I believe many people are still looking to the experts of society regarding many of the issues they face in life. But is that where *we* should be looking?

Notice in v.6 that Paul rejects “the wisdom of this age,” and “the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” When Paul refers to “this age,” he is speaking of the present evil age in which we live, and encompasses all of human history from the Fall of Adam & Eve until Jesus comes again. The philosophers and the rhetoricians of the Greek world created and employed many concepts to express their worldly reasoning, but Paul rejected them.

What about religious leaders? Over the last 6,000 years mankind has come up with hundreds, yea thousands of religions. Shall you look to the religious experts, whether a Rabbi, priest, monk, or self-proclaimed prophet?

In v.8 Paul gives a strong argument regarding the utter failure of natural wisdom to know God, or the ways of God. He says regarding God's wisdom, “which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” The crucifixion is the grand proof that the rulers of this age did not have God's wisdom. It was a major blunder. Neither the leaders of the Jews nor the leaders of the Gentiles understood God's divine wisdom, or who they were dealing with. In their willing ignorance of God, they executed God's Son! The ecclesiastical rulers even had Old Testament prophecy, and yet they still did not know. Peter

graciously said in Acts 3:17, “Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.” Their ignorance did not excuse their sin, of course, because the Lord had given them many evidences that He was their Messiah, and they should have believed. Pilate was in the very presence of truth, and yet he did not comprehend it. He even asked Jesus, “What is truth?” Jesus on the cross prayed, especially in reference to the Roman soldiers, “Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

By the way, note the tremendous contrast between “crucify” and “the Lord of glory.” The one represents the deepest disgrace, and the other the highest exaltation and majesty. Paul said in Phil. 2:8 that Jesus “humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, even the death of the cross.” Yet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day Jesus rose from the dead in all His glory! Truly He is “The Lord of glory.” And yet human wisdom is so bankrupt they crucified Him!

Now I want to give you several reasons to explain why human wisdom is an utter failure regarding the things of God and the big questions of life.

A. Because of our Fallen Human Condition – Unless you accept the Bible’s verdict that man is sinful, and significantly affected by the Fall of man into sin, nothing is going to make sense. And notice one result of this Fall. Paul says in v.14. He says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The term “natural man” (*ψυχικος ανθρωπος*) refers to a person’s natural life as opposed to the supernatural life that comes with the new birth experience. It refers to one who is void of the Spirit of God. In your natural state you are not going to accept or understand the ways of God. Why? It is because the things of God “are spiritually discerned,” not naturally discerned by the human mind. Furthermore, the unsaved person does not understand the Christian. Don’t expect them to! Just as a blind man cannot see the sun, so the natural man cannot see the radiance of the Son of righteousness. And just as a deaf man cannot hear the sweetest music, so the natural man cannot appreciate the sweet tones of the Gospel.

B. God’s Wisdom Cannot Be Discovered by Man, for It Is a Mystery - In v.7 Paul says, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages....” Mystery (*musterion*) does not refer to something strange and puzzling. In the New Testament, a mystery is a “sacred secret,” a truth hidden in past ages. It cannot be known by man’s intellect or discovery. It can only be known by the revelation of God.

Then Paul quotes Scripture to back up his argument and to make this point. He says in v.9, “But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”<sup>1</sup> This verse is often used at funerals and applied to heaven, but the basic application is to the Word of God. Paul addresses the limitation of human knowledge. Because the truths of God are spiritual in nature, they cannot be observed by the human eye or heard by the human ear. Unsaved people “walk by sight” and really see nothing but the physical world. They are blind to spiritual truth. Men need spiritual assistance to understand the things of God.

Notice that Paul adds, “Nor have entered into the heart of man.” The heart is the seat of man’s mind. “To come upon (*επι*) the heart” is idiomatic for conceiving in the mind. Rationalism cannot reason out God’s truth. Man’s two greatest human resources, his observation and his reason,

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<sup>1</sup> We know that Paul often quotes freely and also combines Old Testament sayings. This is an example. He uses Isa. 64:4 and Isa. 66:17 for the second line. This psychological arrangement and progression: eye, ear, & heart, is Paul’s own: Since he found no single Old Testament passage that contained these three, he combines two such passages freely and thus secures the three.

are equally useless in discovering divine truth.

So we cannot know God by human intellect or reason, or by science, or by philosophical speculation. Science is fine in the physical realm of life. But it is wholly inadequate regarding God, or spiritual truth.

Furthermore, human wisdom is inadequate:

C. Because Man is So Inferior to God – This is implied in v.11, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” God said in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” It is impossible for a lesser creature to understand a more advanced one.

For a dog to understand a man it would have to be at least as advanced as a man. How much greater distance is there between Creator and creature? A stream can never rise higher than its source.

So How can anything understand something more complex and advanced than itself? Men can imagine what God might be like, but man’s opinions are irrelevant, because they can never be more than speculations.

So don’t look to human experts to answer the big questions of life. Scientific knowledge has come a long way, but science is wholly inadequate in regard to God, or the ways of God, or the spiritual nature of man, or to answer the fundamental spiritual problems of man.

Well, are we stuck with a bad situation? After all, in v.16 Paul quotes the Old Testament, “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” Is the situation hopeless? Are we to grope in the dark? No! I see another wonderful truth in our text. Instead of looking to human experts:

## II. LOOK TO GOD AND HIS REVEALED TRUTH

Paul says in v.12, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit<sup>2</sup> who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” I call you attention especially to those last words, “that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” The word translated “freely given” (χαρίζομαι) means “to give graciously, give freely, bestow.” God’s truth is high and lofty, beyond the reach of human discovery, but God has revealed it, and wants to enable us to receive it, and understand it.

What kind of things has God freely revealed to us?

A. The Wisdom of God - God wants you to know His wisdom for living. Instead of the false wisdom of this world, God wants you to know His true wisdom. Paul has spent much time in 1 Corinthians showing the fallacy and deficiency of human wisdom. But Paul is not anti-intellectual. He is not calling upon Christians to be dumb and happy about it! In v.6 Paul says, “However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature....” “Wisdom” is placed emphatically forward; it is the theme of this grand paragraph. God wants you to obtain His wisdom, and receive

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<sup>2</sup> Lenski believes this (το πνευμα το εκ του θεου) should be “spirit.” He says, “This is the spirit of true faith and trust toward God, the spirit of humility and love, the opposite of the spirit of ‘the rulers of this world age,’ v: 6.” 1 Jo 4:2 may support this, “εν τουτω γινωσκεται το πνευμα του θεου: παν πνευμα ο ομολογει ιησουν χριστον εν σαρκι εληλυθота εκ του θεου εστιν.” Rev. 11:11 says, “και μετα τας τρεις ημερας και ημισυ πνευμα ζωης εκ του θεου εισηλθεν εις αυτους...” I could find no other occurrence of το πνευμα το εκ του θεου as a clear reference to the Holy Spirit.

all the benefits of His wisdom.

But you may say, “Yea, but Paul says he speaks wisdom only to the mature.” Well, the word translated “mature” (τελειος) in this case probably refers to a person who has reached the τελος or goal. Thus, it refers to one who has full membership in a group, one who is fully initiated. Here Paul uses this term in the same way it is used in other forms by the writer of Hebrews (6:1; 10:14) to refer to salvation. The apostle is not saying that he speaks God’s wisdom only when he is with believers who are advanced in the faith.<sup>3</sup> The simple fact remains that the entire gospel in all its parts is wisdom, though unbelievers may call it foolishness (1:23).

Now this leads to something else that is freely given to us by God:

B. The Gospel – This is what Paul was saying in chapter 1. The world says the answer to man’s sin problem is education, or reform, or good words. But God says the fundamental answer to the sin problem of man is the Cross of Jesus Christ! He died for sin. All we must do is repent of sin, and believe in Jesus. And the proof is in the pudding. Millions of believers can testify to the transforming power of the Cross! Furthermore, the message of the Gospel is simple enough for an illiterate pagan to understand, believe, and be saved. But it is also so profound that the most brilliant theologian cannot fathom its depths.

Our text tells us of something else that is freely given to us by God, and that is:

C. God’s Plan Regarding Our Wonderful Destiny – At the beginning of my message I asked one of the big questions of life: What happens to you when you die? Is there a heaven? Back in 2002 a poll was taken that indicated that 79 percent of American adults believe that every person has a soul that will live forever, either in God’s presence or absence.<sup>4</sup> What will be your destiny?

Well notice what Paul says in v.7, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.” In John 17:22 Jesus said, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them....” Rom. 8:18 says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Then in Rom. 8:29-30 Paul said, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.... Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Yes, it is a staggering thought that we shall one day share in the very glory of God! This glory is the final goal to which God determined to bring us, that blessed state in which we shall see the Lord of glory as He is and shall be made like unto him. What is all human wisdom compared with this wisdom of God’s grace, which has the power to lift us sinners from sin, corruption, and death to everlasting glory? Then Paul says in v.9, “But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Even though Paul is not referring *primarily* to the divine truths about heaven, it does include those truths. God’s plans for His own are so wonderful that our minds cannot begin to conceive of them or comprehend them! We can only imagine what heaven will be like.

When William Montague Dyke was ten years old, he was blinded in an accident. Despite his disability, William graduated from a university in England with high honors. While he was in school, he fell in love with the daughter of a high-ranking British naval officer, and they became

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<sup>3</sup> Lenski: “The view that τοις τελειοις designates the more mature Christians as distinguished from the babes mentioned in 3:1 has the implication that Paul speaks something else to these babes.... What could that be? ... But this view that ‘wisdom’ includes only the difficult things in the gospel is contrary to all that Paul has already said in regard to this ‘wisdom’ when he calls Christ crucified ‘the wisdom of God’ [in] 1:24.”

<sup>4</sup> Atlanta Journal-Constitution, November 2, 2002.

engaged. Not long before the wedding, William had eye surgery in the hope that the operation would restore his sight. If it failed, he would remain blind for the rest of his life. William insisted on keeping the bandages on his face until his wedding day. If the surgery was successful, he wanted the first person he saw to be his new bride.

The wedding day arrived. The many guests—including royalty, cabinet members, and distinguished men and women of society—assembled together to witness the exchange of vows. Williams' father and the doctor who performed the surgery stood next to the groom, whose eyes were still covered with bandages. The organ trumpeted the wedding march, and the bride slowly walked down the aisle to the front of the church.

As soon as she arrived at the altar, the surgeon took a pair of scissors out of his pocket and cut the bandages from Williams' eyes. Tension filled the room. The congregation of witnesses held their breath as they waited to find out if William could see the woman standing before him. As he stood face-to-face with his bride-to-be, William's words echoed throughout the cathedral, “You are more beautiful than I ever imagined!”

One day we will stand face-to-face with Jesus Christ and see His face for the very first time. And I can assure you that His glory will be far more splendid than anything we have ever imagined in this life. And just think, we are destined to share in that glory!

So I encourage you to look to God to know the truth about Him, about the way of salvation, about how to live, and about our wonderful destiny. But how is God's wisdom and truth transferred to us? Well I ask you last of all this morning to:

### III. LOOK TO THE MEDIUM OF GOD'S REVEALED TRUTH

As we have seen, God's truth cannot be discovered by man; it can only be revealed by God, and then received by us. Now the first step of His transmission of wisdom and truth is:

A. By Revelation - In v.10 Paul says, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is the Trinity's agent of transmission and communication. The emphatic “to us,” does not refer to Christians in general but the apostles who are commissioned to speak this wisdom and to make it known. Then he goes on to explain why the Spirit was involved in revealing the wonderful truths of the Gospel. He says in v.10b, “For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” In New Testament times, the word “search” was used like we would describe a customs official going through someone's bags for hidden articles. In v.10 we see that the Spirit searches all things, including “the deep things of God.” This includes His essence and His attributes as well as his thoughts, his purposes, his plans, and his providences in regard to us. This certainly includes “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (v.9).

Paul gives an illustration or analogy to prove his point in v.11, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows<sup>5</sup> the things of God except the Spirit of God.” The inner feelings, the motives, the thoughts, and the volitions of any individual man only the spirit of the individual man knows. Even so, only the Spirit of God fully knows God, and can reveal God. Even husbands and wives who have lived together for dozens of years, never come to know their mates as intimately as they know themselves. Our innermost thoughts, the deep recesses of our hearts and minds, are known only to ourselves. I hope that's not a scary thought!

B. By Inspiration – In v.13 Paul is speaking of the gospel message that they preached, and

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<sup>5</sup> In both cases “knows” is a perfect tense. He has known the things of God from eternity and ever knows.

the message they recorded in our Bible. He says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Holy Spirit is the divine author of Scripture. Paul later said in 2 Tim. 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God, literally, “God-breathed.” God’s Word is for all believers, but was revealed only to the apostles and the other writers of Scripture. Note the repetition of the pronoun “we.” Paul did not leave out the other apostles. Only those men properly can be said to have been inspired.

Paul and the other writers of Scripture did not record their own ideas and interpretations. They recorded what God gave them and only what He gave them. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit did not just inspire the thoughts of the biblical writers. Notice that Paul teaches us that the *words* of the Bible are inspired. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible verbally. The Bible, therefore, not only is God’s Word but God’s words. This is proof positive for Verbal Inspiration.<sup>6</sup>

C. By Illumination - Paul says in v.12, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” God’s wisdom is comprehended by spiritual revelation. The Bible teaches that at the time of our salvation, the Holy Spirit of God comes to dwell in our hearts. At the time of salvation, God gives us the capability of receiving and comprehending the truths of God that we could never understand in our own ability. Spiritual revelation is not something we achieve; it is something we receive. Paul is saying that we can’t in any way—even after we’re saved—understand the things of God unaided. This is why some people have difficulty understanding the Bible.

Then notice what he says in the last of v.13, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” He reminds us of what He has taught us (John 14:26), relates that truth to something new, and then leads us into new truth and new applications of old truth. God gives us new insights into old truths as we compare one part of Scripture with another. When we compare spiritual things with spiritual things, they will join together harmoniously.<sup>7</sup>

It is very important for us to understand that the Holy Spirit does not reveal new truth to us. The truth of God is found in the Word of God. The role that the Spirit has for us today is illumination of His Word, and leading us by His Word. And by the way, the Spirit will never contradict the Word of God. This principle will save us from many errors if we always remember that the Spirit of God speaks in absolute conformity to the Word of God.

Argumentation:

There are 3 primary applications I want to make in conclusion:

1) Receive the Holy Spirit by placing your faith in Jesus Christ. The very moment you trusted Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God entered your body and made it His temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20). He is God’s gift to you. We have a wealth of spiritual resources because the Spirit lives within us!

2) Read and Learn the Scriptures that were inspired by the Spirit. What a joy it is to sit before the pages of the Bible and let the Spirit enable us to understand God’s truth. What a thrill to be able to study the Bible and let the Spirit teach us “the deep things of God” (v.10). The trouble is, many Christians are too busy for this kind of quiet meditation. What enrichment they are missing! I suggest that you make time every day to read the Word and meditate on it. Follow a regular schedule in your reading and give yourself time to pray, think, and meditate. Let the Spirit of God search the Word and teach you. The study and application of basic Bible doctrine can transform your life.

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<sup>6</sup> Though verbal inspiration is supported here, notice that Paul uses *λογος* in the plural form. That refers to words *that embody a conception or idea*. Thus, it can refer to a discourse, or even a doctrine or teaching. “Words” can even be translated “reasonings” here.

<sup>7</sup> Lenski believes this should be “combining spiritual words with spiritual things” based on the context.

3) Depend Wholly upon the Spirit to help you understand the Bible. You may have difficulty understanding the Bible after you're saved because you continue to read it with your human intellect apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sources: R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: I Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).