

The Mind of Christ – A Study of I Corinthians Chapter 2

Sermon 4th Sunday before Lent 2014

Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744, Psalm 112, I Corinthians 2 vv 1-16 p1145, Matthew 5 vv 13-20 p969

Today's sermon is a study of our New Testament lesson – I Corinthians 2, which you can find on page 1145 of the pew bibles. There were various problems to deal with in the Church in Corinth, which is why Paul wrote this letter to them. There was disunity and factionalism. There were vice and immorality. Some Christians were lacking in respect for their brothers and sisters. There were uncertainties about doctrine and ethics. It wasn't clear to the Corinthians what it meant to be the Body of Christ. They didn't understand about the Holy Spirit and the Resurrection. They were unclear on how to live a Christian life in a world surrounded by heathens. What they needed most was the more excellent way, the way of love. Not so very different from you and me then.

Paul begins this chapter by establishing his authority. He reminds Christians of his credentials.

¹ And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

How do we recognise another person's authority? It might be by the uniform they wear – a senior military officer, a policeman, a judge, perhaps, or even a bishop. It might be the place they occupy in the room – the teacher at the front of the class, the speaker on the rostrum or the minister at the dispatch box. It might be that they obviously know what they are talking about or that we know that they know what they are talking about because we know their reputation or their qualifications. We may be impressed by an educated sounding voice or smart clothes or a title. St Paul doesn't rely on any of those things, even though he could have relied on some of them which he could have applied to himself. What he does rely on is the fact that he brings them the *testimony of God*. This is the *testimony about God*, as the pew bible translates it, and it is God's own testimony. It is God's testimony of himself. The authority that I have when I speak from this pulpit and the authority which you have when you speak to your friends about your faith is that you are bearing witness, that you are a conduit for the *testimony of God*, speaking about God in the power of God.

² For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I hope you will forgive me a lengthy quotation here. It's quite difficult, but it's so good I feel I must share it. *"We must not overlook, that Paul does not say 'to know any thing of or concerning Christ,' but to know HIM HIMSELF, to preach HIM HIMSELF. The historical Christ is also the living Christ, who is with his own till the end of time: He works personally in every believer, and forms Himself in each one. Therefore it is universally CHRIST HIMSELF, the crucified and the risen One, who is the subject of preaching, and is also Wisdom itself: for His history evermore lives and repeats itself in the whole church and in every member of it: it never waxes old, any more than does God HIMSELF;- it retains at this day that fullness of power, in which it was revealed at the first foundation of the church."* (Olshausen cited by Henry Alford in his Greek Testament.) The substance of Paul's preaching, the basis of his authority, his credentials, if you like, is that he preaches Christ crucified. It isn't that Paul knows a lot about Jesus and teaches other people a lot about Jesus. It is that Paul knows Jesus and, by the grace of God, Paul is instrumental in bringing other people to that knowledge of Christ. What matters is not so much that we know the facts about Jesus, but that we know Jesus. What we are trying to do in our witness as a local Church is not to inform people about Jesus but to bring them to the point where they can say

that they know Him personally themselves. Once we know Jesus, our lives are transformed by our knowledge of Him and we live His life. We live His life as individual Christians. We live His life as the Church in Cuxton or Halling. We live His life as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

³ *And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*

Paul was nervous when he preached to the Corinthians. In some places, they threw him out of the town and stoned him. Even where people were willing to hear, it was a tremendous responsibility to share the Gospel with them. When we just pause and think Who God is, it is very daring of us to speak of Him at all. Paul was nervous when he preached the Gospel. I guess you and are I too, but it is our mandate as the Church of Jesus to preach the Gospel to the whole creation – no doubt starting from where we are, sometimes the hardest place of all.

⁴ *And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*

⁵ *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

Paul was a very clever man. He had had a good education. He did not, however, try to impress with his erudition. He didn't charm people with fine words. He didn't out argue them with incontrovertible arguments. He didn't try to make people think how clever he was. He didn't set himself up as a rival to the Jewish rabbis or the pagan philosophers. What he did was to show people the love of God. He told them the story of Jesus in the context of the Scriptures and the experience of God's people and the life of the Holy Spirit. Surely we can do that.

⁶ *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:*

⁷ *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:*

Having said that the Gospel does not depend on worldly cleverness or academic prestige, people might suppose that Paul had no time for logic or reason or wisdom or understanding. On the contrary, Christians have a wisdom which transcends the wisdom of this world. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Christ is the *Λογος*. He is the Word. He is reason, logic, knowledge and understanding. To know God and Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent is to have eternal life.

⁸ *Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

The world values wealth and political power, academic prestige and military might, celebrity status and shallow popularity. The wisdom of this world is actually folly. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.* The wisdom of God is self-sacrificial love, demonstrated to its fullest extent in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, the princes of this world, far from understanding wisdom, unable to see true glory even when it was standing in front of their faces, actually managed to crucify the Lord of glory, thereby vindicating the wisdom of God.

⁹ *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

What do people in the world want? Think about it. Some of the things people want are bad things. Some of the things people want are good things. Some of the things people in the world want are morally neutral; they are neither good nor bad. What they all have in common is that they are transient. They don't last. Is it really wise to spend your life on what has no future? To know God, however, is to have eternal life. The wisdom of God says, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* This is the testimony of God. It is what we know of God because God reveals these things to us in Christ. This is what we know. This is Whom we know. This is the knowledge we have to share.

¹⁰ *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

Think about that for a minute. What you know of God, your experience of Him.

¹¹ *For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

Nobody really knows you like you know yourself. You don't know yourself entirely. Only God really knows us. But you know yourself better than anyone else knows you – even your husband or wife. Your spirit knows you in a way that no-one who does not inhabit your body can possibly know you. In the same way, only the Spirit of God truly knows God. But the Spirit of God reveals God to our spirits, to our souls, to us, so that we can know God – so that we can know God, not merely know about God. *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying Abba, Father.* (Galatians 4⁶).

¹² *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

Our credentials as Christians then depend not on how clever we are, or how much we are respected in the world. Our credentials as Christians depend on the fact that God has made Himself known to us by His Spirit. It is because of this *testimony of God* that we ourselves know Him and believe in Him. It is this *testimony of God* which empowers us to share our faith, to share the knowledge of God with other people, which is, of course, the mission of the Church.

¹³ *Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

¹⁴ *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

You can't argue people into faith. If you want to share your faith with someone, start by praying for them. You can't argue people into faith, but maybe you can show them the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God is the Cross of Christ – self-sacrificial love in action. The best way to teach is by demonstration, by example. It isn't whether we can teach people about God by our clever words. It is that people recognise the love of God in our lives.

¹⁵ *But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

With the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we are in a position to make up our minds about whatever is presented to us in our daily lives. In the light of the Holy Spirit of Christ crucified, risen, ascended, glorified, we can make decisions about all sorts of things about everyday life, relationships, ethics, local and national affairs, work, academic subjects, everything in fact in the light of the *testimony of God*. But we ourselves are not judged (in the sense of condemned), because the Spirit has set us free, because *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh. But after the Spirit.* (Romans 8¹). But that is another letter, another sermon.

¹⁶ *For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ.*

And finally, it is often hard to know how to end a sermon, but we can't surely do better than to meditate on the meaning of those words *but we have the mind of Christ*. What it is to be a Christian! Let's think about that as we affirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed on 173.