



The Gifting of Knowledge
Genesis 3:8-15 & 1 Corinthians 2:6-16
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In these weeks following Pentecost, we are looking at what it means to have been gifted the Spirit. How does the Spirit create in us a new body – a new community that represents God’s love in the world, just as Christ had in the flesh? We’ve named that the Spirit creates a family-entity, adopting us as co-heirs of God’s glory in one body. And, we’ve named that the Spirit helps us to see the image of God in our own creation, allowing the glory of God to radiate from our individual selves.

Today, we’re going to consider how the gifting of the Spirit reverses the sin of the garden, turning knowledge from the sinful desire of humanity to the gifted wisdom of the Lord.

In the beginning, God created. Genesis recalls the story of the Garden of Eden, reminding us of the perfect creation of the Divine. In the garden, the created humanity had everything, except one thing: the knowledge of God – divine knowledge. They had food, autonomy, companionship, peace, and a place of belonging. Yet the serpent convinced the human that the fruit of the tree that could provide knowledge was not as consequential as the Creator had made it sound. Lacking just the one thing – full knowledge – the created ate the fruit. The created were unsatisfied being unequal to the Creator.

The story in our reading from Genesis 3 offers the aftermath of the eating of the fruit. The two, the man and the woman, heard the Lord God walking in the Garden, and they hid themselves hoping the Lord God would not find them. God called out, “where are you?”

This is clearly their first time playing hide-and-seek. What an amateur move to respond to the question. But the man responds, “I heard you coming, so I hid. I hid because I was naked.” ... Well, now your secret’s out.

God had forbid the two to eat of the fruit of the tree in the center of the garden. And yet, they went against God’s will, hoping to achieve a level of knowledge that would (perhaps) equal that of God.

And, having eaten of the fruit, their minds were expanded – they did gain knowledge. Now ... well, now, their minds were expanded enough to know they were naked.

The only additional knowledge they seem to have gained from eating the fruit is of their own nakedness. ... What a letdown.

I mean, God comes walking through the garden, and they thought they could hide from the Lord. It doesn't seem like they've gained much knowledge past the exposure of their own flesh.

Their desire for knowledge, their hope to have the mind of God, their purpose in eating the fruit was to have wisdom beyond their own created capacity.

There were consequences for going against God's will. The serpent became the most cursed of all animals. If we keep reading, the story of Genesis names that, because of their attempt to usurp the knowledge of the divine, the woman will have to endure the pain of childbearing, and the man is told that they will no longer have the benefit of the Garden's endless bounty – but that the ground will have to be worked to produce its fruit.

The hope for greater knowledge led to the end of the perfection of creation. Their willingness to follow the prompting of evil to gain knowledge led to the demise of the Garden of Eden. The sin of humanity – the attempt to be equal in knowledge to the divine – brought death upon the created.

In Romans 5, Paul writes that the sin of the one man (Adam) brought sin and death upon all people. But just the same, through the one man (Jesus Christ), life and righteousness are given for all people.

If it is the sin of seeking the knowledge of God that brings death in the beginning, it will be the knowledge of God that gives life through Christ. Christ not only taught about the true knowledge of God, he lived it. His life was a witness to and testimony for the knowledge of God. And following the ascension of Christ, it is this imparting of the knowledge of the divine that Paul believes we receive in the gifting of the Spirit.

As we named last week, Paul's letters are most often written in response to events or concerns that existed within the life of the community. It is well documented that in Corinth, in Greece, there was a regular debate about how wisdom – like that of the philosophers – was a sign of one's prominence. Those who were deemed more intelligent were considered of higher class and of greater importance. Here in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul will be adding his thoughts as to the role of wisdom in defining one's worth or importance.

Paul begins at the start of this chapter by indicating that he has never sought to lead through "lofty words or wisdom." Paul's focus has been on nothing more than Jesus Christ, and him crucified. He begins by saying that our faith is not contingent on human wisdom, but instead, on the power of God. Then we get to verse 6 – our reading for today.

Paul begins by adding this addendum to his last thought, offering that though human wisdom is not what gives us faith, that one who is mature *does indeed* speak with wisdom. However, he contends, this wisdom is not a wisdom of the world, as is used by the rulers of this age.

It's important to spend a moment further defining this opening line in verse 6. We need to define what Paul means where our English interpretation uses the word *mature*. We might, at first reading, think that Paul is speaking of those who have been "of the faith" for some time – those who have studied faithfulness long enough to have something of an advanced understanding of Christ. The Greek word used and translated here is *telios*. In a direct and fairly simple translation, *telios* equates to perfection. So it could indicate that Paul is talking about those with perfect faith. This is the same word used in Matthew 5:48, which reads, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

However, when you read through Paul's usage of this word, and he uses it many of his letters, you find that *telios* – perfection – for Paul is not about *capacity* as much as it is *alignment*. Professor Richard Hays defines it this way, saying, "For Paul, being *telios*, being a spiritual grownup, is defined in terms of concern for the upbuilding of the community, in terms of submission to God's will for service in community, and in terms of pressing on toward conformity to the example of Jesus."ⁱ Perhaps that is why Paul sets the wisdom of one who is *telios* – perfectly aligned with God's will for the shalom of the whole – up against the wisdom of the age, against the rulers of the age, who are most concerned about their individual control and power. Let us not forget that in the season of humanity during which Paul is writing this letter, Caesar is the best example of the rulers of the age – and he chose to have himself referred to as "Lord."

Paul pits the perfect wisdom of God against the worldly wisdom that pursues personal wealth, fame, or power.

Picking back up in verse 7, Paul continues, "We are speaking of God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory." This is the wisdom that the man and woman in the garden believed they could secure for themselves through the eating the fruit of the tree at the center of the garden. This wisdom, Paul readily admits, has been around since before the beginning. And yet, we lacked this wisdom – the rulers of the age lacked this wisdom – no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the human heart conceived of this wisdom.

But ... (ahh) ... the divine but ... "these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

What has long been hidden from us – what was secret and kept from us – what was unbeknownst to us – through the Spirit has been revealed to us. Keep reading the text: Paul lays this out for us.

"No one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God."

Having received the Spirit, we now have a way to understand the will of God. Before the Spirit arrived, we had the witness of Christ; and before Christ, we had the law – which as we learned

last week was at best, an imperfect way for us to know the will of God. But now ... now, we have the Spirit to help us understand the will of God. And because we have the Spirit, we are not just capable of understanding God's will in part. The Spirit of God makes known the perfect will of God – the *telios* wisdom of God.

But not everyone has this wisdom. Paul offers in verse 14, “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are unable to understand, for these are spiritual gifts.” The word *unspiritual* is translated from the Greek word *psychikos*, which sounds a lot like psychic. The word means something much more mundane, simply defining one who is in the natural human form – like Adam who, who even in his attempt to know as God knows, did not have such knowledge. Paul's statement then is something of a redundant phrase. He's simply saying that one who is “without the Spirit” does not receive God's Spirit ... which makes a lot of sense, because they are spiritless.

But, for those who have the Spirit, those who are “spirited,” are able to discern *all things*.

And then, in verse 16, Paul offers one of the most shocking turn of events in the whole of the Biblical story – shocking like, Christ dying for our sin, shocking. Verse 16 begins by asking, “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” Whether Paul chose to borrow this question from the prophet Isaiah or not, it is almost a direct quotation from Isaiah 40:13. Isaiah 40 is passage read most often during the season of Advent – it proclaims the promise of one to come. And, in its general context, when the prophet asks, “Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counsellor has instructed him,” the answer is generally “no one.” The question, as asked by the prophet, is rhetorical.

And yet, Paul answers the rhetorical question in a way one might not believe. “Who,” Paul asks, “has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”

Paul responds, “But we have the mind of Christ.”

We – God's created community; *we* – those gifted with the Spirit; *we* – those who have been called together to represent God's love in the world; *we* – the whole of the Christian community; *we* have the mind of Christ. “[It] is not simply given to any one person but is a gift for the church. The Spirit moves in the new community, and discernment with the mind of Christ becomes a communal process within Christ's body.”ⁱⁱ No one person is empowered to do this work alone – it is work that is gifted to the body, to all who make up the body. Anytime a single person seeks to define the will of God for the community, it is lacking the mind of Christ – for the knowledge of God, the mind of Christ, has been gifted to the whole.

This is the *telios* wisdom – it is the knowledge that drives human flourishing – that God's will is for creation to be as one, to be united through the love of the Creator.

In closing, I want to reflect on an event I had the chance to take part in last week. ACT for Alexandria hosted an event called the IMPACT Racial Equity Forum as part of their mission for

“learning, connecting, and committing to an equitable Alexandria.” The church offered financial support as a sponsor for the event. Along with myself, Kim Young, Marilyn Gould, and Bonnie Thompson were also in attendance.

On Wednesday, the keynote speaker was Nisha Patel who is the Executive Director of the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty. Part of the work that her organization does is identify how to help people move out of poverty. Unsurprisingly, she offered data around the impact of jobs, education, and location. These are necessary for mobility from poverty. But just as important, she said, *just as important* as education and job availability *is community*. Having people to turn to, to rely on, to share life with is just as vital a need for moving out of poverty as having a job. Community is just as important as being able to read. Community is just as important as knowing how to write a resume. Community is necessary for personal growth.

This, Paul offers, is what it means to have life in the Spirit – to be gifted with the perfect wisdom that understands the mind of Christ in its connection – that we are created as one to be God’s people. We are not asked to do this alone, but to share together in the knowledge of God: in the mind of Christ. This knowledge, gifted by the Spirit, allows us to live in to the fullness of who we have been created to be. So might we receive the Spirit, claim our unity with one another, and witness to the glory of God in the world. Amen.

ⁱ Richard B. Hays. *First Corinthians: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

ⁱⁱ Charles L. Campbell. *1 Corinthians: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.