

GOD'S TEACHER

by Ray C. Stedman

I think one of the things that must have deeply impressed everyone who heard Jesus himself teach was the fact that he spoke with such authority about things that other people knew nothing about. Remember how in the Gospels he seems to read the thoughts of other people's minds. He answers questions before they are even asked. He accurately identifies the motives that move people to speak or act, and, even more than this, he speaks of unseen things with familiarity, as though he had seen them himself. He describes what God is like, and the nature of angels. He describes what happens after death. He predicts future events with pinpoint accuracy. At the close of his ministry, as he was about to leave his disciples, they were filled with foreboding and despair not only because of the loss of his presence, but because of the loss of his wisdom and power. In the Upper Room Discourse he said to them, "I will not leave you orphans; I will not leave you alone. If I go away I will send another Comforter to you and he will guide you into all the truth. He will take of the things of mine and show them unto you, and he will say to you the things that I have not been able to say," {cf, John 14:16-18 KJV}. Remember that he said, "I have many things to say to you but you are not able to bear them yet. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth," {cf, John 16:13 KJV}.

In this section in First Corinthians 2, the Apostle Paul is clearly referring to that promise of our Lord about the coming of the Spirit and what the Spirit would teach us when he came. In this chapter, Paul told how he came to Corinth and found a city that was committed to the philosophy and wisdom of men. Even after the church had begun there, the Christians were still exalting the wisdom of the philosophers, following after various men as they spoke. But the apostle has shown how the cross of Christ undercuts all the pride, all the boasting of man, and his power and glory. Instead, Paul speaks of what he calls "the secret and hidden wisdom of God which is made available to us by the Spirit," {cf, 1 Cor 2:7}.

You recall, by way of review, that Paul has said four things about that secret and hidden wisdom:

First, he says, it has been intended for our glorification. This wisdom is the missing link in the body of truth about ourselves and about our humanity. And this body of truth is not something merely religious -- it is something men everywhere desperately need in order to fulfill their humanity. Therefore it is designed and intended, Paul says, for our glorification, i.e., to make us into men and women who are the kind of human beings that God designed us to be. It is designed to produce beautiful people, not only outwardly but inwardly as well -- loving, compassionate, strong and yet merciful and tender-hearted people who are filled with grace, beauty and strength. That is a glorified humanity, and that is what this body of truth will do.

I spent two hours yesterday at the airport in Atlanta listening to a pastor who has been to one of our Pastors' Seminars here at PBC tell me how he had gone home and begun to teach the truth he had learned here to the men of his church. Eighteen of them had volunteered to meet with him for a series of studies, and he had to divide them into three different groups. He imparted to them truth about the New Covenant, about the body of Christ and about spiritual gifts, and he said that as they began to catch on to these things they became visibly different men. He told me that the wives of several of them came to him and said, "What are you doing to my husband? He's a different man! Our home is being transformed; everything is different!" That is the body of truth that Paul speaks of in this chapter, the secret and hidden wisdom of God which was ordained before the ages unto our glorification.

The second thing Paul says about this wisdom is that it is a permanent body of truth. It is something that does not pass away and fade with the changing of the years -- you learn these things and you are not only going to be prepared to live in time, but also in eternity. I was reading one of Dr. A. C. Custance's books recently, and he recalled in it an incident that took place when he was a pre-medical student in college. The professor was teaching them on evolution, and showing them the line of ascent, how human life developed beginning first with the amoeba, then the reptiles, the amphibians, finally the mammals and all the way to the human line. This line of ascent was punctuated at various intervals by the appearance of various categories of life, and

when he had reached man, the teacher said, "Of course, you know that one day the universe will end in a 'heat-death.' This line will peter out into nothing." Dr. Custance said there was a long silence, until finally one of the students said, "Sir, is that all there is?" The professor said, "Yes, that's all I know that there is." It was obvious that the class was uneasy about the meaninglessness of existence.

But here is a body of truth, Paul says, that is designed to transcend time. It is intended not to pass away but to prepare us not only for now but for later, for the great life that lies awaiting us beyond.

The third thing Paul says is that this body of truth is undiscoverable by natural processes. You cannot learn about it in university; you cannot take a course in it at any secular school. No philosopher, speaking outside the Christian framework, ever unfolds this line of truth; no psychologist or psychiatrist who is not instructed in the Scriptures knows anything about it. "The eye cannot find it," Paul says, i.e., it cannot be found by observation. "The ear cannot discover it," he says, i.e., listening to the voices of the past cannot uncover it; you will not read about it in history. Nor is it even available to the reason, to the mind of man. Yet it is truth without which men and women falter and fail, homes break up, violence breaks out in society, and all the evils we see around us begin to flood in. Therefore, it is the most vital line of truth the world can know anything about. Paul says that this truth is made known to us by the Spirit.

It is available; you do not have to suffer without it, but it is only made known by the Spirit. Verse 10,

God has revealed to us [these things] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him. So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. {1 Cor 2:10-11 RSV}

That passage introduces to us now this mighty teacher come from God, the Holy Spirit himself, who is designed to instruct us with the Word of God and lead us into the truth of God that will change our lives and expose us to this secret and hidden wisdom of God. When you discover that, I want to tell you something: Life is going to be exciting and adventurous, like nothing you ever dreamed before, for this line of truth is designed to set us free, to let us be the men and women God designed us to be.

Notice how the apostle underscores here the spirit's knowledge first: "No one understands the things of man except the spirit of man which is in him." Have you ever tried to talk to your plants? Many people do these days. We are told that plants can respond to our moods and reflect our attitudes. I know a woman who even prays over each plant. I don't know what it does for the plant, but it probably helps her a great deal. But it is clearly evident that plants do not talk back. (If they do, give me a call right away! I'll see if I can help you.) Life is constructed at various levels; the higher can take hold of the lower, but the lower cannot reach up to the higher. We have plant life, we have animal life, then human life, then the angelic life, and finally, divine life. The higher can reach down to encompass the lower, but the lower cannot reach up to the higher. That is Paul's argument here. Though no animal can reach into the realm of human relationship and converse with us, other human beings like ourselves can.

Do you ever try to tell your troubles to your dog? I know people who do. I've done it myself. A dog is man's best friend; he seems so sympathetic. Do you know what your dog will do if you talk to him? He'll whine, wag his tail, and lick you on the face. He knows you're trying to get something across; he is trying so hard to understand, but he cannot comprehend the things of a man. If you sit down and tell your troubles to your wife, however, she will understand. Or if you tell your troubles to your husband, or your friend, they will understand. Fortunate is the man whose wife is his friend, or the woman whose husband is her friend. They can understand because the spirit which is in man shares a common basis of knowledge.

Now here is this great Being of God in our universe, this fantastic Being of infinite wisdom and mighty power. How can we know anything about him? Paul's answer is that we cannot, except he discloses himself to us. You cannot find out God by searching. Man by wisdom does not know God. Man by investigation of all the natural forces of life will never find his way to the heart of God. Only God himself must disclose himself, must open himself to us. That he has done by means of the Spirit of God -- the Spirit has come to teach us about God. The Lord Jesus himself appeared as a man in order that we might have a visible

demonstration of what God is like. The simplest answer to the question, "What is God like?" is to say he is like Jesus, under all circumstances. But it is the work of the Spirit to show us what Jesus is like. Jesus said, "He will take of the things of mine and show them unto you," {cf, John 16:14 KJV}. You can read the record of the Gospels, and read the historical record of Jesus, but the living Lord does not stand out from the pages merely by reading them. It is as the Spirit illuminates those pages and makes them vivid and real that you find yourself confronted with the living, breathing Christ himself. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes the method that the Spirit has taken by which he does this fantastic thing. Verse 12:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. {1 Cor 2:12-13 RSV}

That seems a rather complicated passage and perhaps it is, but I think we can get help from it if we look at it rather simply. There are five steps here that Paul says the Spirit of God has followed in order to teach us this secret and hidden wisdom of God:

The first step is that the Spirit begins with the apostles. Paul says, "Now we [apostles] have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God." The spirit of the world is that intelligent, strange being behind the whole thinking of the world. He is described to us in very clear and vivid terms in Ephesians, Chapter 2, where Paul says, "You [believers] he made alive when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in sons of disobedience," {Eph 2:1-2 RSV}. From that we learn that behind all the strange, confused knowledge and wisdom of the world is this spiritual being the Bible calls the Devil. The world does not know that; worldlings are like so many dumb animals led to slaughter without realizing where they are going. But Paul says that is not the spirit we have received. Remember how he put this to Timothy, "We have not received the spirit of fear to fall back into bondage, but we have received the spirit of love and of power and of a sound mind," {cf, 2 Tim 1:7}. Jesus had said this would happen. He told the disciples, "The Spirit is now with you; he shall be in you," {cf, John 14:17}. And on the day of Pentecost the Spirit of God came in a new and fresh way. He had been present before in the world, but he entered into the disciples and from then on these apostles who were to give us the Scriptures were men and women filled with the Spirit.

Then Paul tells us the second step was that the Spirit of God taught them and illuminated their minds.

[We have received] the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. {1 Cor 2:12b RSV}

He is not talking about spiritual gifts here; he is talking about the whole realm of knowledge and truth that God has given us. Now these apostles began to understand it.

Have you ever noticed in reading the Gospels that the apostles did not understand Jesus when he taught? He baffled them; he puzzled them; he said things that left them scratching their heads. He angered them at times; he upset them; he said things to people sometimes that embarrassed the apostles. On one occasion they turned to him and said, "Lord, don't you realize you offended those Pharisees?" {cf, Matt 15:12}. As if he did not realize that! He was constantly puzzling them. But when the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, suddenly all that Jesus had said began to make wonderful sense and, thinking back over all that they had heard from his lips, they began to see it in a totally different light.

That is the reason why non-Christians can read their Bibles and it seems to be a totally different book to them than when a Christian reads it. Many of you have had that experience. Before you became Christians you read the Bible and it was such a dull book; there was nothing exciting in it. Then you became a Christian, you received the Spirit, and the result was that the book came alive. Things that you once had puzzled over became clear, and you found yourself fascinated by it. A man said to me recently that he had just become a Christian and for four-and-a half hours straight he could not lay the Bible down because the Spirit was teaching him

from its pages. This is what Paul is talking about here. The Spirit began with the apostles; they were illuminated by him.

Then another phenomenon happened, Verse 13:

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but words [implied here] taught by the Spirit. {1 Cor 2:13a RSV}

As you know, one of the major arguments of our day is over the question of the inerrancy of scripture. People are asking afresh today, "Is everything in the Bible true? Does the Bible speak with authority in every realm of life? Is it true in what it says about scientific, geographic, and astronomic matters, etc? Or is it true only when it tells you how to get to heaven?" I think that question is answered by Paul's statement here. He says that when the apostles began to speak and to write the Scriptures, they did so by words taught by the Holy Spirit. I do not think he meant by that that the Spirit of God dictated the Bible to them. Oftentimes evangelicals are accused of believing in a dictation theory, but that is not what Paul is saying here. What he is really talking about is a process by which the Spirit of God awakened the minds of the apostles to understand truth, and they chose their own words to express it so that every apostle's personality comes through in the words that he uses. And yet, in a strange and wonderful way, those words which the apostles chose are words that God himself approved. Therefore, they come from him, not in a direct, but in an indirect sense.

Paul says to Timothy, "All scripture is breathed out from God," {cf, 2 Tim 3:16}. If that is true, then it comes from a God who cannot lie, a God who makes no mistakes, a God who sees the end from the beginning, so every word in Scripture is true. As the apostles wrote these things down, therefore, we can trust what they had to say.

A young man was telling me just before this service how he has discovered in his life that he does not have to understand the Bible always in order to benefit from its wisdom. He said, "I've learned that I don't always understand everything it tells me. But I know this: If I obey it, I will benefit from what it says." That is the truth, because it is the Word of God, the living Word, the Word of truth from the Spirit of truth. Now that is the third step in this process.

Then there is a fourth step. Paul says,

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. {1 Cor 2:13 RSV}

That whole phrase is a translation of three words in Greek, and it is a difficult phrase to translate. If you have a Revised Standard Version, there are two other possible translations given in the margin. One is, "interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language," and the other is, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." It is obvious from that it is rather difficult to translate this. The verb that is translated "interpreting" here is really a word that means, "to fit things together." What I think Paul is describing here is the process of taking the wisdom of God, these great facts about our personalities and our makeup, the facts about life, the facts about God himself that are revealed in this secret and hidden wisdom of God, and fitting them to the circumstances and the personalities of each individual. In other words, making the Word living to us. That is the work of the Spirit of God as well.

We have all had that experience, if we are believers.

Now in order to do this, we must be indwelt by the Spirit as well. Paul uses a word here that indicates that. He calls us "spiritual people" -- *pneumatikoi* -- is the word. It comes from the Greek word for spirit, which is *pneuma*. Who are the *pneumatikoi*, the spiritual people? Well, they are those who have received the Spirit. Do you know that one of the arguments widespread today is, "How do you receive the Spirit?" There are some that tell us it must be by a dramatic demonstration that results in speaking in tongues. I was talking with a girl not long ago who said, "You know, the evidence of receiving the Spirit is speaking in tongues." I said, "Do you mean to say that everybody who has not spoken in tongues does not have the Spirit?" "Well, no," she said, "I didn't mean to say that." "But you said that the evidence for receiving the Spirit is speaking in

tongues," I replied. "Well," she said, "maybe there's something else there that I don't understand." I assured her that there was.

According to the Scriptures you receive the Spirit when you believe in Jesus. That is what he himself said. On the great day of the feast of the Tabernacles recorded in John 7, he said, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water,'" {John 7:37-38 RSV}. John adds, "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive;" {John 7:39 RSV}. And in the first chapter of his Gospel, John says, "To all who received him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave power [power is the work of the Spirit] to become children of God," {John 1:12 RSV}. Everywhere in the Scripture you find that the moment you believe the word about Jesus -- who he is, what he did, and what he can do for you as Lord of your life -- in that moment you receive the Spirit.

There is a beautiful analogy that Scripture draws. Have you noticed how oftentimes Scripture compares the new birth to physical human birth? This is Mother's Day, and all you mothers who are here became mothers because you gave birth. Every one of you knows that, though the moment of birth was an unforgettable time, the moment of conception occurred without you even realizing it, when in an experience of love, two tiny seeds joined together and a new life began by that union. It began to develop and grow, and soon it became evident to you and to everyone else that a new life was there. That is the way the Holy Spirit is born into our hearts. Nobody knows when it happens, but when the ovum of faith meets the sperm of the truth of God about Jesus, a new birth occurs; the Holy Spirit enters a life. Those who receive the Spirit, then, are born again into a new creation, Paul terms it, and as such are rendered spiritual persons.

The apostle goes on in the next passage to contrast this with carnal Christians. What he means is that carnality is a state of temporarily not relating to the Spirit. But spiritual-minded Christians are those who not only have received the Spirit, but, as Paul describes it in Romans 8, "they have set their minds on the things of the Spirit," {cf, Rom 8:5}. They listen to the Spirit; they hear the word of the Spirit; they believe the word; and they act upon the word of the Spirit. This whole body of truth then becomes active in their lives and they are changed.

There is the process. It begins with the indwelling of the apostles, then the illuminating of the apostles' minds, the preaching of the apostles in words chosen by the Spirit, the indwelling of every believer by belief in the word that the apostles preached, and the illuminating of the mind of each believer to understand truth as it fits his or her life directly.

That is the process by which this great body of fascinating truth, the secret and hidden wisdom of God which is intended for our glorification, will begin to change our lives, our homes, our families, our community, our nation, and ultimately, the whole of the world.

You would never think up that process, would you?

No man ever designed that. But God did, and the evident results of it are fantastic and powerful in their effect, as Paul describes them in Verses 14-16. That passage will describe to us why the world can never solve its problems, why it is locked into the same pattern of failure, generation after generation, and the only breakthrough that can ever occur is to someone who opens his mind and heart to the word of the Spirit, to be taught by the Spirit, and to begin to live on the basis of these life-transforming things.

Prayer

Father, how grateful we are for this mighty teacher, the Spirit of God, come from you into our hearts to instruct us of the things of Jesus and give unto us his very life that we might live a new and different way. Lord, we thank you that you have made available to us through the simplicity of faith, profound and mighty truths that men in their wisdom and arrogance cannot discover, but which is open to the simple and humble-hearted among us. We pray with Jesus, "Thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes." Help us, then, to be babes in understanding, that we might accept

these truths and find them delivering us from the power and grip of evil. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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