

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Remember the Scarecrow in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*? What was it he wanted from the Wizard? A brain! His head was filled with straw. Then finally, at the end of the movie, after all his heroics, the Wizard gives him an honorary degree: *“Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Universitatus Committeatum e plurbis unum, I hereby confer upon you the honorary degree of Th.D.”*

“Th.D.?” asks the Scarecrow.

“Yeah – that... that’s Dr. of Thinkology.”

The Scarecrow is elated and, lo and behold, he spouts the Pythagorean Theorem, *“The sum of the square roots of any two sides of an isosceles triangle is equal to the square root of the remaining side. Oh joy! Rapture! I’ve got a brain! How can I ever thank you enough?”*

And the Wizard says, *“Well, you can’t.”*

Yet, of course, the wizard didn’t actually give him anything. The Scarecrow had always been the brains of the outfit. He didn’t know what he had going for him. His folly was not knowing that the wizard had nothing to give.

- B. I wouldn’t want to draw too strong a parallel, but Christians can be like the Scarecrow. In Corinth in 50 AD the Christian believers wanted to be wise. That’s a fine idea, except they wanted to be ‘wiser than thou.’ So on the one hand they formed factions based on which Christian teacher they followed, and on the other hand, they tried to find ways to tap into the popular Greek philosophers to give them extra credibility. Which was kind of like going to the Wizard of Oz to get a brain.
- C. Our church here in the shadow of a Christian university has a somewhat unique experience with learning and wisdom. Some here have, or aspire to have, considerable academic learning, some in theology. I never feel as

though our scholars here think themselves better Christians, but I think some who are *not* so scholarly might think their well-educated brothers and sisters have some spiritual advantages they lack. Our text today from **1 Cor 2:6-16** will help us all realize just how the wisdom of God in Christ works. Please turn there.

- D. In the verses before this Paul has taken on the boasting believers. He has taught us that we have no reason to boast over which Christian teacher we follow because Jesus is the only one who died for us, and it is only in Jesus' name that we are baptized. And as for thinking some eloquent wordly-wise wizard can juice up our standing in the church, **never forget** that God frustrates the wise of this world by making the message of the cross foolishness to them all. **Never forget** that most of us whom God chose to save were nobodies to the heavy hitters in the world. They're not impressed that the likes of us would trust Christ. And if that's not weak enough, **never forget** that the messengers whom God does send to proclaim his wisdom, if they are useful at all, invariably come in "*weakness, fear and trembling,*" because God never wants anyone to trust the messenger instead of the message. We have nothing to boast about, except for the gospel. Paul said in **2:2**, "*I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" That is the wisdom of God. **Vv.6-10...** Don't forget what you have!

I. **WE WHO KNOW JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED HAVE GOD'S WISDOM (2:6-10)**

- A. We read the first phrase of **v.6**, "*We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature,*" and we might look around and say, "*Good, and when will you speak to the rest of us?*" But in this particular verse Paul actually means all Christians have a certain kind of maturity because every Christian who has heard and believed the

- Gospel has already received the makings of a mature, complete faith. There is not something else you still need.
- B. **Vv.6b, 8...** Sometimes Christians try to supplement their faith—juice it up; make it more sophisticated—by integrating it with something they learn from outside Scripture—from philosophy or spirituality or psychology. They go to the wizards of Oz. But when it comes to the wisdom of God in Christ that found a way to reconcile sinners to the holy God, the smartest people in the world are as dumb as a doorknob. We gain nothing from that but an insight into the vast varieties of spiritual ignorance.
- C. **V.7...** It wasn't only the intelligentsia of the world who were blind to the wisdom of God in Christ. Even those who loved God and searched the scriptures could not put the pieces together. It was a holy mystery. In all the symbols, ceremonies, stories and prophecies—even in people—God hid his plan for saving people in plain sight. **1 Pet. 1:10-12** explains it this way... You remember the story in **Luke 24** of the risen Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus? **Lk 24:44-49...** Paul summarized this mystery which is now laid open to everyone who trusts Jesus: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* That is the wisdom of God. This is the mystery that every Christian no knows. No secret about it. What's more, **v.7** adds, *“and that God destined for our glory before time began.”* Incredibly, God had *us* in mind—each of us and all of us—when he laid out all the intricate story lines, all the sacrifices and feasts casting their long shadows, all the prophecies of a coming King and Savior—God was thinking not only how to *save* us but how to reclaim us for glory. He did this *“for our glory!”*
- D. Aren't **vv.9-10** beautiful....? Paul is paraphrasing a verse from Isaiah 64:4. There Isaiah pleads that God *“would rend the heavens and come down... to make your name known to your enemies.”* He remembers how God did that in the past—saving his people through mighty acts that they

could have never imagined (their deliverance from Egypt, for example). Listen to **Is 64:4-9**... Now Paul is saying here in 1 Cor 2 that *“Jesus Christ and him crucified”* is God’s answer to that prayer for salvation.

Who could have ever imagined *seeing* the Son of God lying in a manger, much less executed by his own people on a Roman cross; or *seeing* a God-man, three days dead, walk alive from the grave, not merely resuscitated, but made new, a second Adam to give rise to a new race of God-blessed immortals?

Who could have ever imagined *hearing* a voice from heaven say, *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased”*? Who could’ve imagined hearing the Son of God say, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* or his dying words, *“It is finished”*? Or an angel say, *“He is not here. He is risen!”* Or Jesus: *“You will receive power with the Holy Spirit comes on you...”* Or the angel’s promise, *“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

What mind could have ever *conceived* of a salvation for hell-bound sinners that satisfies the unbending justice of the Holy God, or a creation so desperately damaged being recreated, or a people so beloved that they themselves become God’s temple and heavenly dwelling?

Yet *“these are the things God has revealed to us—to every person who trusts Christ—by his Spirit.”* Is there any Christian here who did not know all that?! Of course, you know it. That is why I can say that **we who know Jesus Christ and him crucified have God’s wisdom.**

Even when the Son of God died on a cross before their very eyes, and rose again to be seen by many witnesses, still no one put the pieces together. No one grasped the wisdom of God. So God took one further step—he sent his Spirit to make his wisdom clear.

II. CHRISTIANS KNOW GOD'S WISDOM IN CHRIST ONLY BECAUSE GOD'S SPIRIT REVEALS IT TO US (2:10-16)

This is a kind of step-by-step instruction.

- A. **Vv.10-11...** Only the Spirit of God can know the deep things of God. Just as your spirit knows you better than anyone else, so it is with God. The difference is that no matter how introspective I may be, I cannot ever know myself as thoroughly as God's Spirit knows the mind and heart of God. **And what does the Spirit find deep in the heart of God?** Illus.: Pastor Michael has been taking a philosophy class this week and I heard him bandying about words like *phenomena* and *noumena*, *noema* and *noesis*. Pretty deep stuff! **But not as deep as what the Spirit finds in the depths of God:** his deep love for lost people and his unquenchable desire to save to the uttermost, even at the price of his one and only Son. *That* is what God's Spirit finds in the depths of Almighty God!
- B. **V.12...** The Spirit of God, fresh from searching the deep things of God, is sent to us so we may understand what God has freely given us in Christ. So we can understand "what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived." The deep Christian is not the person who knows who the rider on the red horse in Revelation is. The deep Christian is not the person who can describe the ingenuity of chiasm in the Psalms or who can prophesy or speak in tongues. **The deep Christian is the person, to use Dr. Carson's words, who acknowledges what an utterly profound privilege it is to know God and be reconciled to him by the crucified Messiah.**" [p.52, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*] And by that standard, every Christian should be deep; we all can be wise.
- C. **Vv.13-14...** Many of you work in specialized fields with specialized language and concepts. Before you can go very deeply into that discipline, you have to learn the lingo and the elementary concepts. Illus.: Dr. K here cannot take me

very far into the wonders of chemistry because I don't know a Ph balance from a periodic chart. **In a much more profound way, we cannot grasp the wisdom of God without new language and new concepts which the world's brightest and best know nothing about.** This process rests entirely on God's Spirit. God's Spirit teaches us the real meaning of words that have small significance to the philosophers of this world—Messiah, holiness, transgression, redemption, glory, faith, hope, love—and then he uses this new meaning-enriched language to teach us the deep things at the heart of God. Illus.: Think of the songs we sang this morning—“How Great Is Our God,” “Wonderful, Merciful Savior,” “Praise You for the Cross.” The person without the Spirit knows the words, but they have no idea what they mean to the believer. They do *not* know how great our God is. They do *not* care about the wonderful mercy of our Savior. They have never praised God for the cross. Why? “*Because,*” like the verse says, “*[such things] are discerned only through the Spirit.*”

- D. **Vv.15-16...** The language of these verses has been used to justify all kinds of renegade thinking and actions. No, this does not make every Christian an authority unto himself. No, this doesn't mean we cannot question one another's judgment. It means this: Thanks to what the Spirit teaches us about Jesus Christ and him crucified, any Christian can understand life through the lens of the wisdom of God in Christ. Whatever it is you must face this week, you can see it through the wisdom of God in Christ. You can see God's sovereign hand and his loving purpose, you can see how sin is met by grace, and how despair is answered by our hope in God's goodness and our everlasting life. We see that Abraham's words are true, “*the Judge of all the earth will do what is right,*” because we have seen his wisdom in Christ crucified, risen and reigning till he brings us home. **You, dear friends, have the wisdom of God!**

Conclusion

I have friends who are quite intellectual, as you probably do. Some of them are dismissive of our faith, as if it were merely our spiritual hobby, or a child's imaginary world, or some dreamer's utopia. But as I get older, I find myself increasingly frustrated with their closed minds. It is a pseudo-intellectualism that does not account for a sovereign and holy God who has made himself so evident in creation, in history, and most significantly in the man Christ Jesus. How is it that smart people can think that it doesn't matter if our hearts are far from the God who created us and owns us? How is it that their understanding of evil or forgiveness or justice can be so infantile that it takes no account of their own hearts, or knows utterly nothing about true grace, or the elementary issues of inward righteousness? How can they so blithely dismiss the words and historic facts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection?

Well, it is because no one understands these things unless God's Spirit makes them clear to us. The wizards of this world have nothing more to offer than "*the authority vested in me by the Universitatus Committeatum e plurbis unum.*" No one ever *thinks* themselves to God's wisdom on their own because our hearts are so resistant to bowing before the Lord, because we are so settled in doing things our own ways for our own ends.

Do not go to those wizards for a brain. If you are trusting Christ, God has given you the very wisdom of God. There is nothing better than that!

I leave you with a whimsical and insightful poem by Calvin Miller:

*Gray, wrinkled, three-pound thing, I clearly see
I cannot trap you with an EEG,
You nervy organ, you, skull cased and free,
A brazen challenge to psychiatry.
Soft mass, I cannot help resenting you
Each time they search and probe for my IQ.*

*Half of Einstein's lobe was twice of you,
You joyless megavolt computer shoe.
Be careful, Judas organ, or you'll find
God cauterizes every rebel mind.
You small, gray lump, you always seethe and grind,
Spend small electric currents thinking blind.
Yet, you're the only shabby place I see
That his Great Mind may come to dwell in me.*