

Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

October 10, 2012

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

Psalms 118; Hosea 13:4–14; **1 Corinthians 2:6–16**; Matthew 14:1–12

Background and Context

In 1 Cor 1:10–4:20, Paul responds to reports about division in the church at Corinth over certain leaders in the name of “wisdom.” Such “wisdom” was actually more a concern for polished oration than significant content. Paul begins by contrasting their stance of human wisdom with the nature of the gospel itself (1:18–25), their own experience of it as God’s people (1:26–31), and his own preaching (2:1–5), all of which stand in stark contradiction to their own boastings. Up to this point, Paul has been rather hard on “wisdom,” so he shifts gears at 2:6 in order to defend a certain type of “wisdom,” one that comes from the Spirit of God and should lead them to a different type of behavior.

1 Corinthians 2:6–16

⁶ Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷ But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him” —

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³ And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny.

¹⁶ “For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

Commentary

God's wisdom is altogether different than the human wisdom the Corinthians are boasting about. Instead of being associated with this present age and its obsession with rhetorical eloquence and charismatic personality, this wisdom is centered on the now-revealed message of salvation that comes through a crucified Messiah (2:2). In Paul's time, as in ours, the great leaders of the world cannot understand this mystery, for everyone knows that victory comes through destroying one's enemies, not being killed by them. But according to Paul's gospel, this is how God is redeeming the world.

Furthermore, according to Paul, the truth of this message is revealed only to those who have the Spirit of God. To make this point, Paul uses an analogy: as a person alone knows his or her thoughts, so God alone knows his thoughts, unless he reveals them. Paul explains that God has done exactly that to those who have the Spirit. Only God's people can know and understand God's wisdom—the good news of Christ crucified—because they have the Spirit. The irony is that this includes the Corinthians; they know and have accepted the message of the gospel, but their behavior betrays them. They act, instead, according to the wisdom of this age rather than according to the mind of Christ. The implication is that they should acknowledge the folly of their “wisdom,” which is causing division within the church, and turn back to God's wisdom.

Discussion Questions

1. What questions did this passage raise in your mind?
2. Which part of this passage convicts you the most? Inspires you the most? Why?
3. This passage teaches us that the Spirit should mark God's people in ways that their values are radically different from the wisdom of this age. What might be some of these ways?
4. According to one commentator, this passage “has endured a most unfortunate history of application in the church. ... Almost every form of spiritual elitism, ‘deeper life’ movement, and ‘second blessing’ doctrine has appealed to this text.” How might using “God's wisdom”—Christ crucified—as a paradigm for Christian living upend any and all attempts to misuse this passage in these ways?
5. What did you learn about God from this passage?
6. Regardless of where your faith is at right now, if you were to apply what we learned about God to something in your life this week, what would that be?

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.