

**Autumn Ridge Church Women's Bible Study**  
**Unity in Love: 1 Corinthians**  
**Unity in the Spirit: Chapter 2**  
**Jann Wright**



Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. Last week we began a series called, Unity in Love which is a study on 1 Corinthians. Today our topic is Unity in the Spirit. We will be looking at Chapter 2. However, before that, let's drop back and review what we learned last week and look at the historical and cultural context in which Paul lived and worked.

Corinth

Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus to the church in Corinth in 55 A.D. Corinth was a busy port town, located just off the Corinthian isthmus. (Map) In many ways it was the chief city of Greece. It had a population of about 250,000 free people, and as many as 400,000 slaves. The NIV Study Bible notes that, "It wasn't a university town like Athens, but it was characterized nevertheless by typical Greek Culture. Its people were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high premium on wisdom".<sup>1</sup>

Corinth had at least 12 temples. The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was the most infamous. The people engaged in prostitution as part of their worship. Last week we learned that the expression "to corinthianize" meant to sexual corrupt someone.

Cultural Context

Paul lived in a time greatly influenced by the ancient philosophers. Our youngest daughter, Sarah, is in her second semester as a philosophy major and was kind enough to explain to me some of the historical significance of the philosophers of this time period.

Cicero was a famous Roman Statesman and philosopher who lived a hundred years or so before Paul's writing of 1st Corinthians. He was considered the last great moral Roman statesmen. He was a profound rhetorician and orator. He is credited with shaping the thinking of our founding fathers with his writings on democracy and public speaking. All the great orators would have read and known his speeches. So most certainly the philosophers of Paul's day would have been well acquainted with Cicero and his rhetoric skills.

Aristotle the Greek philosopher was considered the greatest thinker of all time. He lived and taught in the fourth century B.C. He opened his own school and trained students in the study of philosophy. Before him in the 5th Century B.C. were the great philosophers Plato and Socrates.

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<sup>1</sup> *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version. 10th Anniversary Edition.* 1995. Zondervan Corporation. Grand Rapids p.1734.

Obviously Aristotle, Plato and Socrates lived centuries before Paul, but they still impacted the culture. Much like the fact that the Civil War was more than 100 years ago and Martin Luther and the Reformation 500 years ago, but both events still have influence in our culture.

Some of the philosophy groups of Paul's time were the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Skeptics. Over time as with many things, ideas had been corrupted. While some of the early philosophers were concerned with truth and the moralness of decisions, some of the later schools of thought no longer cared if something was right or moral. Like today they did not like the idea of absolute truth. Some focused on the art of debate specifically to make money or to convince others of their position even if it lacked a moral foundation.

These were some of the historical and philosophic underpinnings of the culture of Paul's day. It is helpful to get a sense of that context as we examine Paul's words in this chapter.

### Paul's Approach: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians, we will begin reading in Chapter 2, Verse 1.

*And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup>For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup>My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup>so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.<sup>2</sup>*

Paul begins by explaining his approach as he proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in Corinth. He did not focus on eloquence or human wisdom. He did not preach with wise and persuasive words. Despite following the age of great philosophers, the foundation of Paul's message did not rest on rhetorical strategies.

### Elements of Rhetoric

However, Paul was not degrading the process of studying, writing, and planning presentations, or even rhetorical devices rather he was saying that those elements were not his main focus nor the reason for their conversion. Paul actually did use elements of rhetoric in some of his most well-known writings and speeches.

In Rhetoric various strategies are used. One is kairos which is looking at the culture and climate in which you are speaking, taking the temperature of the room so to speak. We see an example of this when Paul was speaking in Athens on Mars Hill in Acts 17. It is also

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<sup>2</sup> New International Version (NIV) Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

present when he says in 1 Corinthians 9:22 . . . I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

Other rhetorical devices are ethos which is an appeal to our own integrity, Paul does this as well when he says in Philippians 3: If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more, then he goes on to list his credentials. Then there is pathos which is an appeal to emotion, which we see in Galatians 3 when he says, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified". Finally, there is logos which is an appeal to logic which Paul also used.

But the success of the gospel did not rise and fall on his ability to argue and debate his position. The proclamation of the gospel was not built on the foundations of the philosophers of past generations, the gospel was built on the wisdom and power of God. No matter how much we study ancient philosophers or utilize modern techniques, all of it will be of no use unless we have the wisdom and the power of God.

We live in a culture that is not really built on the classic foundations of rhetoric, but nevertheless one in which style and the ability to hold an audience spell bound is seen as a great asset. For decades we have been entertained by television and now we have on demand almost any visual we want. We don't have to watch whole sporting events, we can just catch the highlights of the football play offs, or the two minute recap of the NBA game we missed. We can fast forward through boring parts of television programs, or skip songs on an album that we don't like.

We like to be entertained. My guess is that the Corinthians did too. But Paul was not an entertainer, he was a preacher of the gospel of Christ. He knew that he was nothing without the wisdom and power of God.

### Applications of Paul's Approach

Perhaps you are saying to yourself, "I am not preaching or even teaching so what can this possibly have to do with me". There are two applications we can immediately make from this passage to our own situation.

#### We are Listeners.

The first, is that we are listeners. We are hearers of the word. While we don't have to endure being bored to tears by our preachers, we need to be careful that we are not creating a demand to be entertained so that preachers and teachers feel pressured to perform for us. We don't want to be part of the problem. We should always focus more on substance than style. Paul was likely reminding the Corinthians also not to get distracted by the great orators of the day, always being drawn to some new flashy thought, but instead to rest on the foundations of the faith, Christ and Him crucified.

#### We all have Opportunities to Share Our Faith.

The second application is that We all have opportunities to share our faith.

It is helpful to remember that we don't have to rely on eloquent words or human wisdom, or even the power of persuasion. That puts a lot of pressure on us and we just can't measure up. One of the simplest ways to share our faith is to tell our own faith story. We are experts in that area and those stories are very powerful.

My daughter Katie several years ago went on a business trip with my husband to Chile, she was about 17 years old. While there they had dinner with one of Scott's business colleagues who was a pharmaceutical executive. This guy moves in a business world that depends on style and a command of persuasive argument to sell products.

While at dinner the conversation turned to worldviews. Katie had just had a class at school on worldview and actually was quite excited about all she was learning. They begin to talk about Christianity and compared and contrasted it with other views. The colleague was of the opinion that all worldviews were basically the same. To which Katie explained actually no they are not.

She mentioned a few verses from the Bible and asked if he had ever read the Bible, to which he answered no. Then she asked, "do you even own a Bible?" Again, the answer was no. So she reached into her bag, pulled out her Bible and said, this is my personal Bible which has my notes and markings in it, but I will give it to you if you will commit to actually read it.

He at first didn't want to take it, but realized because of her demeanor she was offering him something of great value. So he did take it and I hope read it. It wasn't her knowledge of worldviews that caused him to consider reading the Bible, it was her own faith story.

All of you have stories as well. Don't depend on wise and persuasive words. Don't depend on the discipline of rhetoric. Depend on the wisdom and power of God.

Possibly the three greatest evangelists in North America in the last 150 years were D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham.<sup>3</sup> Both Moody and Graham were not known for impressing their audiences, but were often seen as very simplistic in their messages. Sunday was known for his flashy style, but he preached a very basic gospel.

That is what Paul was doing, he presented the gospel in simple straight forward terms in the power of God. We can certainly use modern and up to date strategies for preaching and teaching, but we must never change the basic message of the gospel: Jesus Christ crucified for the sins of the world.

Paul also said he came in weakness, great fear, and in trembling. I think that is true of most anyone who does public speaking and especially Bible teaching. You don't want to make a mistake, you don't want to miss the mark, and you don't want to poorly represent Christ. We also might wonder if Paul felt weak because of his inability to play

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<sup>3</sup>Blomberg, Craig. NIV Commentary Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids pg 61.

on the same field as the philosophers. Or if he was in great fear and trembling because of what might physically happen to him as a result of his message.

However, Commentator John MacArthur gives us a different perspective, he says, "Paul came to Corinth after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, run out of Thessalonica and Berea, and scoffed at in Athens . . . He was fearful and trembling only in the sense of being deeply anxious that the gospel somehow find root even in this most unpromising of places."<sup>4</sup>

That is how we should approach our responsibility to share the gospel. Not so much with fear and trembling of what we might experience, but with a concern for the terrible fate that awaits those who do not know Christ. We have a great responsibility, but we also have the wisdom and power of God.

#### Godly Wisdom: 1 Corinthians 2:6-9

Paul is laying a foundation for the church at Corinth to see the very basics of the faith and how they are different from the world. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 he says, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

Paul has been addressing the issue of divisiveness in the church at Corinth in a general way, but in later chapters he will get very specific. Last week Gretchen explained the various factions that had formed around Apollos, Paul, and Peter. Paul chastised them that Christ is not divided up and handed out to different groups, but rather they are all part of one body.

Now, he is now going to further lay the framework for unity in the church. Realize that Paul was not saying that the only thing that could ever be preached was the Cross, but rather that this was foundational to everything else. As we will see as we move through our study Paul is going to address many different issues in the church, but he has to clarify some basics upfront.

Paul in the beginning of this chapter distanced himself from the wisdom of the world, yet here he circles back to the issue of wisdom lest we get the wrong impression. Let's look at verse 6:

*<sup>6</sup>We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. <sup>7</sup>No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. <sup>8</sup>None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup>However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—*

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<sup>4</sup>MacArthur, John The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians. Moody Press, Chicago. page 56.

Wisdom does have a place among Christians, but it is particular type of wisdom. What our culture defines as wise and successful is very different from the Biblical definition.

Our culture might define success by looking at the number of Twitter Followers one has:  
Top Number of Twitter Followers<sup>5</sup>

Katy Perry	94,423,675
Justin Bieber	91,333,699
Taylor Swift	83,150,216
Barack Obama	82,389,985
Rihanna	69,289,184
YouTube	66,191,016
Lady gaga	64,995,109
Ellen DeGeneres	64,810,250
Twitter	58,761,996
Justin Timberlake	57,771,684
Britney Spears	50,019,969
Kim Kardashian West	49,670,882

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Are these the wise of our day? They certainly seem skilled at getting out their message and getting others to listen. Are the wise among the 10 wealthiest in the world? They obviously have skill in making money and keeping it.

World's Wealthiest<sup>6</sup>

Bill Gates	75 B
Amancio Ortega	67 B
Warren Buffett	60.8 B
Carlos Slim Helu	50 B
Jeff Bezos	42.5 B
Mark Zuckerberg	44.6 B
Larry Ellison	43.6
Michael Bloomberg	40 B
Charles Koch	39.6 B
David Koch	39.6 B

However, Paul says the wisdom of the world is not the wisdom of God. This message of wisdom is for the mature. The NIV commentary notes, "Because those who are not mature are unbelievers, the mature in this context must be all Christians, at least in principle . . ." <sup>7</sup> Many of the Corinthians were not living in the light of this fact and sometimes we don't either. In chapter three Paul will more narrowly define maturity by distinguishing between the Spiritual Christians and the Worldly Christians.

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<sup>5</sup>[twittercounter.com](http://twittercounter.com), accessed 1/21/17. Top twitter #followers.

<sup>6</sup> ([forbes.com](http://forbes.com) World's Billionaires) accessed 1/21/17.

<sup>7</sup> NIV Commentary, page 63.

However, here he contrasts the believers and non-believers. He says the rulers of this world are not the possessors of wisdom regardless of what they or we might think. In fact, the rulers of this world demonstrated their ultimate lack of wisdom by killing the Son of God. Caiaphas was the Jewish High Priest and he sent Jesus to Pilate on charges that would result in his execution. Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea who ordered the execution. They were high level rulers for both the Jews and the Romans. They cannot be considered examples of wisdom.

### Secret Wisdom

Paul describes a secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden. Unfortunately, this is a verse that is often twisted to mean a secret that is available only to special Christians or those with special gifts.

A more modern application might be the trend that says to tap into God's secret wisdom we have to do a certain strategy for evangelism or a certain program for a church building campaign, or a certain curriculum for Bible Study, or a certain style of music.

This secret wisdom can also inappropriately take the form of single issue Christians. They like single issue voters focus on only one aspect of the church such as apologetics or foreign missions or Christian authors or social activism and if you don't do that one thing to the exclusion of other aspects of the church you are missing the secret wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

All of those are misapplications. The secret wisdom is actually a very open secret to which all believers are privileged to understand. This secret wisdom refers to the mysteries in the Old Testament that were hidden or incompletely revealed, such as the suffering Savior, the Cross, the Atonement for our sins, that now are revealed. The concept of the crucified messiah was not clearly understood in the Old Testament and was not always grasped in Paul's day. But we have access through the scriptures to this secret wisdom.

It is a natural human tendency to want to know secrets or short cuts to things. Several years ago, my husband lost a lot of weight. Many were concerned about his health, but when he revealed that he had intentionally pursued a course of weight loss, people gathered around him at social events like flies and wanted to know his secret. He is a physician perhaps there was a new drug or therapy that would promote weight loss. They were very disappointed, the secret he told them was he ate less and exercised more.

The secret wisdom in this passage is similar. You are going to have to put forth some effort in Bible Study and prayer to understand some of the concepts in the Bible, but they are an "open secret". They are available in this case as Paul calls them to the spiritually mature which are those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross for their sins. The immature reject him.

### Role of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:10-15

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<sup>8</sup> NIV Commentary page 69.

Let's now look at the role of the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of God is available to all Christians additionally because we all have access to the Holy Spirit living within us. We have to listen to that Spirit, and be willing to yield ourselves to it, but we have it available to us. Look at Verse 10:

*<sup>10</sup>these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

Paul gives a very human illustration. If someone were to ask me, "How are you doing?" The only person who truly knows the answer to that question is me. Only our own spirit within us truly knows our thoughts. In the same way the Holy Spirit intimately knows the thoughts of God. Paul goes on to talk about the Holy Spirit in great detail.

*<sup>12</sup>What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. <sup>13</sup>This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. <sup>14</sup>The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. <sup>15</sup>The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments,*

The Holy Spirit helps us to understand spiritual truths, to explain spiritual realities, and to be discerning about decisions. In John 14:26 Jesus says this about the Holy Spirit: "*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*"

The Holy Spirit reminds us of the words of Christ, and brings to our memory guidance from the scripture about how to live. That was something that the Corinthians really needed, especially given some of the issues in their church. It is something we need as well. Recently, I have been reading a book that we gave to all of our high students who attended the fall retreat. It is called *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney. I thought this excerpt was especially relevant:

*"The Word of God is the "sword of the Spirit," but if there is no Bible physically accessible to you, then the weapon of the Word must be present in the armory of your mind in order for the Spirit to wield it. Imagine yourself in the midst of a decision and needing guidance, or struggling with a difficult temptation and needing victory. The Holy spirit enters your mental arsenal and looks around for available weapons, but all He finds is a John 3:16, a Genesis 1:1, and a Great Commission. Those are great swords, but they're not made for every battle. How do we go about filling our personal spiritual arsenal with a supply of swords for the Holy Spirit to use?"<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup>Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. NavPress, Colorado Springs 2014, page 42.



I think that is very convicting. The Holy Spirit does his job, but we have to do our part as well. It is hard to bring to our minds the words of Christ and of scripture if we don't have any way to recognize them.

Paul is pleading for unity in the church in Corinth. He reminds them of the basics of the faith, Christ and him crucified. There is no substitute for this as our foundation. However, Paul wants us to deepen our understanding of these truths because they influence every part of our church and our lives.

#### The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 2:16

We have wisdom that is beyond the world's, we have access to truths even believers in the past did not have because they had not been revealed through the entire counsel of God in the Bible because all of it had not been written. We have the Holy Spirit to help us.

Finally, Paul says we have the Mind of Christ. Verse 16, *"Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.* We Christians are privileged through the Holy Spirit to have a glimpse into the mind of Christ. That should profoundly influence how we live.