



Maybe you've heard this phrase before: imitation is the highest form of flattery. If you imitate someone it's because you've been influenced heavily by them. You can even see this in children, can't you? Maybe you've seen it in yourself. There are motions your parents had and then you realize you've adopted those same mannerisms. In Jesus' ministry while he was on the earth, he would confront the religious leaders often. At one point, he confronts their "imitation." They're imitating someone and it reveals who they are following and are heavily influenced by. He says to them that they are of their father, the devil (John 8:44ff). The devil has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning and those same desires were within the religious elite.

I think we'd all agree that imitating the devil is not a good thing. I would hope none listening would ever say they want to be imitators of Satan. I mean, we're Christians after all. Christian means that we are "little Christ's." It was a derogatory term used of the early followers of Jesus. Yet, the believers took it positively. They lived in such a way that it revealed they were imitating Jesus. But that doesn't mean Christians always only follow Jesus. We still sin. Satan is very crafty. Paul, in the letter we refer to as 2 Corinthians, writes about not being ignorant of Satan's schemes. He can deceive Christians into imitating him without us even knowing it. And actually, what we're learning in 1 Corinthians is that these divisions within the church were actually simply an outflow of imitating Satan – not the Lord. How do I know this? Because Paul refers to their actions as being a wisdom of the world. "World" isn't referring to this sphere floating around in space around the star we call the Sun. It's a word referring to the fallen disarray we're in due to Adam and Eve's rebellion in following Satan's temptation.

Satan seeks to divide God's children. I think of Revelation 12:10, where Satan is referred to as the accuser of the brethren. He accuses Christians day and night of being unworthy, of being unfaithful, of being unloved, of not making the right choices. He accuses, accuses, accuses. These accusations seek to divide God's people from God, and from one another. As you hear this, I hope you aren't haughty over the Corinthians thinking you're not divisive. Honestly, I think temptations in the midst of shelter-at-home orders can increase our temptations of divisiveness. Think through the various ways we can use information to be divisive: 1) Let's get back to assembling together because Hebrew says to assemble together versus someone who says, "The Bible says we aren't to love our neighbor." 2) Do we obey the Governor's orders because the Bible says to obey rulers because they're God-ordained? Or, do we righteously protest because some say she's gone too far? 3) Let's just get back to work versus let's shelter so more don't get sick, 4) Should we vaccinate our children if a vaccine comes out? Yet or no? 5) What about shaking hands in the future?

All of these points, and so many more, can become issues of divisiveness if Christ is not our center. They're issues of divisiveness because you either take one stance or another. And, in taking your stance, you have to divide from others in certain ways because you're probably adamantly opposed to the other side. Yet, this isn't how it ought to be amongst believers. Satan loves for us to imitate him in dividing. But Christ came to unify. Paul said earlier in chapter 1, "Is Christ divided?" No. Therefore, believers are not divided from believers.

But how do we maintain unity if we have differences of viewpoints on these things? Does that mean these things don't matter at all? No. Even in the disagreements between favorite teachers, Paul isn't saying that he or Peter or Apollos or Jesus don't matter. What he is saying is that we must understand the right order of all things. And, if we do, we won't be divisive. Even if one prefers Apollos or another prefers Paul, they won't take it to the level of divisiveness. Or, in our context, if someone says, "Stay at home for three more months" and another says, "Let's get back to work this week," we won't let that divide us as Christians. We can, as Paul says in Romans, be fully convinced in our own minds, and be utterly submissive to Christ and loving towards one another.

This is where Paul is going in this letter to the Corinthians. And, the text we're studying today might come off as somewhat confusing. First Corinthians 2:6-16 almost seem like a different topic altogether, but before these verses Paul talks about the wisdom of Jesus and his cross-death in order to reveal that the Corinthians are unified not on the basis of worldly wisdom and dividing people from one another. And then after these verses, Paul continues to talk to them about the sinful divisiveness. So, these verses relate to the essential need for Christians to live out the unity they have in Christ. Let's read them together and then we'll dive deeper into the meaning of these words:

⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" — ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. ¹

The reason why Paul talks so much about wisdom here is because he has been arguing that God's wisdom is not like the world's wisdom. In the first century, this word for wisdom referred to the sophists who spoke in such ways that made them sound like they were very wise. In addition, Paul says that the Jews demanded signs in order to believe something. Paul's point is that any viewpoint that a human being holds to will never give you eternal meaning. Your smarts, your signs, your philosophy, your political viewpoints, your good works – none of these things will ever make you right with the Creator.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:6–16.

All these things can do is make you climb the ladder of earthly, worldly success. So, you're either better than or worse than others. This is worldly wisdom, and Paul says that this isn't God's wisdom. You weren't rescued and reconciled to God because of this wisdom. You were reconciled to God because of Jesus. Jesus came as a human representative who lived the perfect life in the place of sinners. He died the death sinners deserved to die – taking God's justice on himself – and then rose from the dead and now draws people to God. Jesus didn't do this because you were so great. He did this because you were so bad. You were bound in your sins – and God saved you because he's purely gracious!

At this point, you could say, "Well then, I guess God doesn't care about wisdom." Who cares about learning and studying! That's not the conclusion we should come to. In learning, we can learn more about God. I wouldn't know the Bible if I didn't know how to read! I've grown in appreciation and awe of God because I've learned many things in my education. But, Paul's point is that this world will never save you because this world is limited to this world. Earlier, Paul asked them to consider their calling – to consider what they believed when they were reconciled with the Eternal God. They embraced a wisdom not of this world. Therefore, we need a wisdom that transcends this world. And, as those who imitate Jesus, this wisdom supersedes all worldly wisdom. This wisdom is the foundation of all we do. Therefore, these "worldly" matters submit to the superior wisdom.

With this understanding, here's the main idea of the text: **God grants spiritual wisdom for salvation, not natural wisdom, to the spiritual.** This morning, I'm going to begin with "natural" wisdom and why God does not grant that for people's salvation. We're going to be jumping around in the text, but I hope that you are challenged, strengthened and encouraged as we walk through this. So, let's get to the first point:

1. God does not grant natural wisdom for salvation.

Natural wisdom leads to us either going to self-pity or self-boasting. If I do well, I'm good. If I do poorly in something, then I'm a loser. This mindset leads to clear division between those who do well and those who don't. This is what happened in Corinth. There were those who "had" and those who "had not." Paul continues to break down this type of mentality. It's natural wisdom. In verse 6, Paul refers to it as "a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away." It's a wisdom that doesn't help the rulers of this age because in verse 8, Paul says that none of the rulers of this age understood. Then in verse 14, Paul says that the "natural person" does not accept the things of the Spirit of God."

All of these statements teach us something about natural wisdom.

First, **Natural wisdom is bound to this age.** Does this mean that $2+2=4$ is going to die away. Or that rules of space and matter are going to be done away with in the New Heavens and New Earth. The Bible indicates that there will be space and matter in eternity future. So, there are rules of knowledge. But, it's not going to be under the Fall, so I imagine the rules are going to be different, and the implications are going to be far greater. Everything that we know here, apart from God, is all part of a natural wisdom that is bound to *this age*. Is this all the wisdom you want to know? Is this all you want to live for?

In a book written by a man named Tony Reinke, he talks about the number of books in the Library of Congress. He writes the following: **Currently, the Library of Congress houses eighteen million books. American publishers add another two hundred thousand titles to this stack each year. This means that at the current publishing rate, ten million new books will be added in the next fifty years. Add together the dusty LOC volumes with the shiny new and forthcoming books, and you get a bookshelf-warping total of twenty-eight million books available for an English reader in the next fifty years! But you can read only**

2,600 – because you are a wildly ambitious book devourer. . . . For every one book that you choose to read, you must ignore ten thousand other books simply because you don't have time (as quot. in Um, pp. 44-45). All this study for information that's going to pass away. This wisdom is bound to this age. That doesn't mean it's unimportant. But it's only really important if it's brought to submission to the superior wisdom. But there's a problem. This wisdom is not only bound to this age,

Natural wisdom is bound to sinful people. Paul talks about the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away. Let's say you gain the most wisdom possible in this world. Then you die. Now what? People can joke around saying that those who die with the most toys wins. You could say that the man dying with the most natural wisdom wins. But the reality is that he's still dead. He's going in the ground for his natural body to waste away. You gain smarts. You die.

Yet, this phrase "doomed to die" seems to have the connotation of future judgment to it. Someday, God is going to do away with all this man-centered "wisdom." This information system that only centers around us and doesn't really emphasize the glory and majesty of God. This type of wisdom is *doomed*. And the rulers of this age are doomed. This reminds me of Psalm 2 that talks about the nations raging against God and against his anointed. Unless you come humbly to the Son, you will die. It doesn't matter how powerful you are. It doesn't matter how smart. It doesn't matter. You're in your sin.

This idea of sin may sound foreign to you because by sin I do not mean "bad actions," but sin is defined as anything that dishonors God. Any thought, word or action. God is the all-glorious, supreme One. If you do not submit to him, you're a traitor against the King. Therefore, Paul says the rulers hold on to a natural wisdom that tries to divorce God from it. Because they won't acknowledge God, Paul shows us how their sinfulness is revealed. In verse 8, Paul says the rulers don't understand God's wisdom.

If the rulers had understood God's wisdom, they would not have crucified Jesus. Again, I'm reminded of Psalm 2. The rulers rise up against God and his anointed. The rulers would not have crucified Jesus if they really understood God's wisdom. But then, verse 9 says that they never will understand on their own: But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"² Natural wisdom simply cannot come up with a story that speaks of a Triune God, and God the Son coming in human flesh, suffering, dying in the place of sinners, rising from the dead, ascending to Heaven, bringing a New Creation to all who come to God on the basis of faith *alone* in the Savior *alone*. And, all of this is by grace *alone*.

The natural person simply couldn't come up with these things. The story would be too good to be even imagined. But not only this, Paul goes on in verse 14 to show us that even if the natural person is confronted with these realities, they won't accept the things of the Spirit of God. This is the problem of human's sinfulness. It's not merely that we're victims of Satan or the Fall. Humans are willful agents who align with the Fall. We will not accept God's wisdom unless the Spirit overpower us.

So, let's bring this back to the Corinthian church context. They were creating divisions over favorite teachers. They were dividing with Paul because they began to follow others. As you read on, you discover that they were dividing between people who they thought were super-spiritual and others who weren't as spiritual. They were dividing over spiritual gifts. Again, natural wisdom, when taken to conclusions that are founded in sinful human reasoning will never embrace God, and thus they will always create factions – even amongst God's people.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:9.

The same is true for us. If we allow natural wisdom to come into Ventura, we'll break apart. Oh, "I'm of Piper." "I'm of Moody." "I'm of Bunyan." "I'm of Christ." Or "I know politics very well. Do you? . . . Oh, you don't? Well then. . . ." "I'm good with money. That means I'm wise in God's eyes. Do you have a sufficient savings? No?" "You believe what the media is saying about COVID?!" or, "You don't believe COVID is serious?!" We can begin to judge and despise one another (to use Paul's words in Romans 14). This is worldly wisdom. This is imitating Satan. This natural wisdom will always create a breakdown at some point. Even the best systems are bound to break. That's why some even call the United States the Great American Experiment. How long will it last in a broken world? And, if we bring this kind of wisdom into the church, the church will soon die. This is why Paul addresses this so quickly in his letter to Corinth. They need to see their embrace of natural wisdom – and they need to turn to the greater wisdom. And, that leads us to the next point.

2. God grants spiritual wisdom to the spiritual.

Let's read several verses together. As I read these verses, notice the words that relate to receiving or giving. Start with verse 6: ⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom³. Now, go to verse 7: ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.⁴ Now go to verse 10: ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.⁵ Skip down to verses 12-13: ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.⁶

Natural wisdom does not receive or accept God's wisdom. Why? Well, I think in Paul's context, wisdom was not understood as *personal*. Greeks wanted sophistry. They wanted good-sounding arguments. Jews wanted signs. If someone had signs, they were in awe. Think of how Matthew describes Jesus' ministry. Many people were in awe of Jesus' miracles, but Jesus called them to *repentance*. He didn't just want large crowds. He was calling people to come to him, give their lives to him for rescue and thus give their lives for him.

In our day as well, many people don't talk of God as a personal being with whom they fellowship. They don't seem to view sin as defiance against God. Or, if they view sin this way, they think they have to do something to make themselves right with God. Thus, in this *relationship*, they have to depend on themselves or their own works to make them right. I believe it was C.S. Lewis who said that the defining difference between Protestant Christianity and the rest of the world religions is salvation apart from our works.

All worldly, natural wisdom ends with putting our trust in us. But God is calling us to a different wisdom – what Paul refers to here as "spiritual." But what is this wisdom? When he says "spiritual" does he mean some kind of ethereal, emotive wisdom that we feel inside of us? No. Look back to 1:30: ³⁰**And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God. . . .**⁷ Who became wisdom for us? Jesus! That's why Paul then goes on in verses 1-5 in chapter 2 to say that he has determined to know nothing

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:6.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:7.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:10.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:12–13.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:30.

but Jesus Christ and him crucified! What is the message of God's wisdom? The gospel message! And, what's the gospel? Let's make sure we understand what the gospel is. The gospel is Jesus and what he alone did to reconcile sinners to God. That Jesus died in accordance with Scripture, that he rose in accordance with the Scriptures. The wisdom of God is the God-Man, Jesus.

This message is the foundation of Christianity. A pastor by the name of David Platt once said, "**We are settling for a Christianity that revolves around ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves.**" And, I would add, not simply abandoning ourselves, but abandoning ourselves at the feet of Jesus. We lose our life for *his sake*.

Jesus and the cross is God's wisdom. Do you trust the message is true? Do you give yourself to Jesus? If so, that means your whole life is shaped. Where natural, philosophical wisdom will stop at us or at created things – when we know Jesus, we are enlightened to see all things from an eternal perspective. Again, it's not that we deny education and learning. But we recognize our approach to all of this is different. We don't act as gods, where everything should serve us. Or, we don't view ourselves as judges and we decide whether people are in or out. Instead, the wisdom of this world is submissive to Christ. What Christ says motivates, challenges, strengthens us. We therefore are stewards in this world for his glory!

Do you live this way? Or, do you still cling to natural wisdom? Paul gives us reasons why God's wisdom is superior. First, **Spiritual wisdom is outside of nature's bounds**. Verse 6 says that it's a wisdom not of this age or of the ruler's of this age. Again, think about Psalm 2. At the end, the psalmist calls the people to "kiss the Son." That means to turn to him for rescue and forgiveness of sin. True wisdom is not to live in rebellion against God. True wisdom is to turn to the Son!

This wisdom is not doomed to pass away. It won't die. Why? Because Jesus conquered death. In addition, this is a wisdom that verse 7 says was decreed before the ages. This is an outside-of-time wisdom. The plan of God was *always* to rescue people on the basis of his mercy and power alone. Humans weren't going to rescue themselves or prove themselves to God. God was going to reveal to humanity and all creation how glorious he is! He decreed, he implemented, Jesus came, Jesus conquered, Jesus reigns! Natural wisdom tried to thwart. Paul says the rulers of this age crucified the Lord of glory! They did not want him. But in the very action intended to war against Jesus, Jesus saved people. Do you see how powerful our Lord and Savior is!

This wisdom is superior to anything we could ever come up with. Natural wisdom is bound to creation. It's bound to this age. It's bound to sinful humans. Spiritual wisdom is outside of this age. It's from God. Natural wisdom leads to division. Spiritual wisdom leads us to union with God and one another.

As a result of this, Paul says this is a "secret and hidden wisdom." It's secret and hidden because being born sinners, born under the Fall, we are bound to our sinfulness. It's not secret because God hasn't spoken to the world. It's secret and hidden out of our view if God doesn't open our eyes and cause us to see it. The only way sinners will be accepted by God and see things the way God sees it is if God gives us the wisdom from above. Notice how the natural wisdom is something we humans *naturally embrace*. But notice how often Paul says that spiritual wisdom is given or imparted or received. It's not something we can make up or get on our own. We can't attain to reconciliation with God. Yet, like the people of Babel, we build our towers to the Heavens, thinking we can be like God or attain Heaven. No. Instead, God the Son came down to us and has given all. Verse 9 says that we simply cannot comprehend how much God has prepared for those who love him! Wow! What amazing truths. All of grace alone, through

dependence alone in Jesus alone, we receive glories that he alone can grant! From beginning to eternity, all of life is about God's grace through Jesus. Even our embracing of Jesus.

We would never accept Jesus unless the Spirit miraculously worked in our lives. That's Paul's argument in verses 10-13. The Spirit testifies accurately to us because the Spirit is the Spirit of God. One with the Father, the Spirit comes to humanity and shares with us some of the thoughts of God! So, for those of us who have turned to Jesus, we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit who is from God. And, look at the end of verse 12: so "that we might understand the things freely given us by God." All blessings come to us not because we are so great, but because Jesus is so great. All blessings come to Corinth not because they are a part of the "in" crowd – whatever that means – but because they are in Christ! The same is true for us.

Therefore, we should treat each other in this way. In these verses, Paul shows us that the Spirit has taught us these truths, and Paul also says that he and the other teachers have imitated God by imparting these truths to the Corinthians and the world! This is the message that ought to be repeated over and over throughout the ages in and amongst the church. So, in verse 13, Paul says "we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual."

The foundation of all teaching is Jesus Christ and him crucified. **Wisdom is to look at the glorious Christ so that we can behold the glory and majesty of God. This all comes by the Holy Spirit. Do you see our Triune God here? As we live this way, we will grow in awe and gratitude for the God who has given us all.**

Do you live this way? Are you one of those who are "spiritual" and "mature?" What does it mean when Paul says he imparts the wisdom to the mature? Or, you go down to verse 13, which says that they impart truths to those who are spiritual. When we use the word "spiritual," we mean it in a very wrong way many times. We'll say sarcastically, "Oh, you're so spiritual!" Why do we use the term spiritual as a mocking term? Spiritual is a good thing. And, when you merge it with the idea of "mature" – along with the context of the Spirit's working – it refers to someone who is being made whole by the Spirit. **To be "spiritual" is someone who is living in dependence on the Spirit.**

That's the simple definition – living in dependence on the Spirit. As a result, Paul gives a conclusion of **how we can know we're living in dependence on the Spirit.** Read verses 14-16 with me again: ¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. ⁸

Paul causes us to look at the results of being spiritual or natural. The natural person won't accept Christ alone. The natural person won't accept Christ as wisdom and the cross as the foundation of all wisdom. It's foolishness to them because it's spiritually discerned. But the spiritual person judges all things. What does that mean? Does that mean Christians are super-judgmental? No. It means that the spiritual person can look at all the knowledge of all the books of the Library of Congress. The Christian can read philosophers throughout the ages or scientists or sociologists – and the Christian can make correct judgments on the basis of Jesus. The Christian can see the "cry" of the fallen heart for the eternal, and the Christian can also see how Jesus fulfills the longing. Therefore, the Christian is not judged by anyone. No

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:14–16.

philosophy can tear down God’s wisdom. It’s eternal. It’s outside of Creation. The world tried to destroy God’s wisdom on the cross, and Jesus rose from the dead!

Therefore, Paul writes in verse 16, “who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” The answer is no one. You don’t instruct God. And then Paul says “But we have the mind of Christ.” Wait. Does that mean that all Christians are perfect? No. But it does mean that if we’ve embraced the Lord, then we have the mindset of Jesus given to us. It’s worthy of following.

The Corinthians have been rejecting this mind of Christ and going back to the mindset of the world. The mindset of the world is like a bucket full of holes, trying to hold water. The mindset of Christ is secure. So, Paul is calling the Corinthians to embrace the mind of Christ.

What’s interesting is that this phrase “mind of Christ” is used elsewhere – like in Philippians 2 – and it refers to living a life of sacrifice for others and love for others on the basis of Jesus. Let this mind be in you, Paul said in that chapter. Here, Paul uses “mind of Christ” again in the context of a church with divisions. The mind of Christ means we are all united in Jesus – and those who are mature and spiritual are those who live in such a way to recognize the unity, seek to sharpen each other and lift each other up in the wisdom of Christ. Divisions within God’s people is following natural wisdom of the Fall. Unity within God’s people is following the mind of Christ. Therefore, one man wrote of these verses: ⁹To have ‘the mind of Christ’ is to have a cruciform mind.” It requires putting to death selfish ambitions, humbling oneself, and giving oneself for others (as quot. in Garland, p. 102).

Yes, I know that this text could sound quite confusing, but Paul is here digging deep in the ground to build a strong foundation for our beliefs. Christians have an eternal foundation in Jesus and the gospel message. Keep this central in everything. Test all beliefs in accordance with Christ and the gospel. Test your attitude and behaviors towards other people within the church. Is Christ shining through? Is the gospel of love and sacrifice on display? **Is their disunity and division in your heart or are you melted and moved by a Savior who sacrificed all and loves supremely so that you could rejoice in the eternal glory of God? If you’ve been changed by him, then may you also want everyone, especially your brothers and sisters in Christ, to grow in this wisdom, too.**

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⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:14–16.