

1 Corinthians 2.6 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. *7*No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. *8*None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. *9*However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—*10*but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

*The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11*For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. *12*We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. *13*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Dear Friends in Christ,

LETTING GOD FINISH HIS OWN SENTENCES

So you are talking to a friend, telling her about your day: "My boss completely changed my work responsibilities. It made me feel so, umm..." "Frustrated, yah, I know how you feel," says your friend, "my boss did that to me a few months ago. He didn't even ask!" You say, "No, I didn't feel frustrated. I felt completely liberated. I hated most of my old duties." "Oh." Sometimes, people finish a sentence for us and get it completely wrong.

Sometimes, finishing someone else's sentences can be helpful—like when you can't think of someone's name. But most of the time We feel like they don't understand us—and don't even want to! It's like we are too dumb to say what we are thinking, or they only want us to think what they want us to think. What it basically comes down to is an issue of respect. If I respect you as a fellow person, with your own thoughts and insights, I am going to let you finish your own sentences.

I. The Holy Spirit (not we) Speaks for God

Sometimes, people finish God's sentences for him. Have you ever heard people say, "I think that God wants us to..." or "I don't think that God would ever condemn that." Sometimes we say that when we are just having a good religious discussion, and we realize that our opinions are just opinions.

But often, when I hear people say "I don't think that God would ever...", people are defending something they know many or most Christians don't approve of. So they resort to imagining that they know God's mind better than everyone else and they finish God's sentences with what they want to hear. "I don't think that God would ever..."

Which is exactly the spiritual attitude God corrects in today's reading. We hear, "***We speak a message of wisdom... not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom.***" God's wisdom is different, completely different from the wisdom of "this age." And God's wisdom is a "***secret wisdom.***" It cannot be known unless God reveals it.

He says, "***Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?***" Exactly! No one can speak for you. No one can complete your sentences for you. No one else really knows what is in your heart of hearts. "***In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God***" (11). No person should ever rest anything important on the statement, "I don't think that God would ever..." To be frank, what you or anyone else thinks doesn't matter in the least! At least grant that God might have things in his "heart" that we cannot know.

But we can know some things. While ***“no one knows the thoughts of God,”*** it adds, ***“except the Spirit of God.”*** God’s will is known by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, *“who in unity with the Father and the Son is glorified”* (The Nicene Creed). Which leads us to ask, “Then how do I get a line to the Holy Spirit, so that I can know God’s will?” Scripture tells believers, *“You know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you”* (1 Cor. 3:16). Jesus promised, *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). When we become believers in Jesus, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts.

Part of the miracle of faith is that God’s Holy Spirit lives in God’s people and gives us guidance. But I also know this: at many points Christians differ: Should we baptize children or not? Should just anyone who shows up receive the Lord’s Supper? Is homosexuality ok (it’s not)? Do I have to work for heaven, or is it a gift? If Christians with the Holy Spirit in their hearts differ, does that mean that the Holy Spirit is contradicting himself? A lot of the reason there is debate is because people finish God’s sentences for him, especially in controversial matters. People take shortcuts and start saying things like, “I don’t think that God would...”

But I can’t just throw rocks at other people’s houses. I also know that my heart likes what will benefit me. My own heart is full of prejudices, greed, carnal desires and ego. I rush to defend myself, often mistaking my personal stances as God’s stances. I have experienced the truth that God’s Word tells me: *“The [human] heart[, my heart,] is deceitful above all things and beyond cure”* (Jer. 6:10). Therefore, while I trust God’s Spirit to guide me, I also know that there is a traitor within me, my sinful nature. And I need to continually return to Jesus, asking his forgiveness. And I continually need to listen to what he would tell me—not finishing his sentences for him.

God knew the perversity of the human heart, that there would be deceivers and false teachers. He also knew the weakness of the human mind, he knew that we have biases we don’t even realize. So God’s Holy Spirit has given us a record of God’s will. It is called the Bible. In Isaiah, God said, *“To the law and to the testimony. If they do not speak according to this word, they do not have the light of dawn”* (8:20).

So I must return to the guidebook, to the Bible, where God’s Holy Spirit speaks clearly. In the Bible there is no fog of self-interest and personal preference. God’s Spirit speaks. That is why simply praying to God is not enough, because you are not returning to the pure guidance of the Spirit of God. That is why we need to come to worship, to have Word-centered devotions in our homes, because when we are left without that compass in our lives, we start to finish God’s sentences for him. And as long as we are sinful people – and we will be as long as we are on this earth – our human reason will try to finish God’s sentences in ways it likes.

II. God’s Plans are Unimaginably Good!

But here is the really cool thing about listening to God’s Spirit.

So, a rich man says to a poor man, “Remember that money you said you needed, I want to deposit to your bank account...” “\$100” the poor man finishes the rich man’s sentence, “I said I needed \$100, but I could really use \$125.” And the rich man laughs a hearty, loving laugh. “You know, you should let me finish my sentences. I know that you need \$100, but I am planning to deposit \$10,000.” Listen to verse 9 of our reading: ***“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit”*** (9).

With our puny, infantile, human reason we always think we know what God should do. But God always does something better than we could ever imagine.

It is on display in God’s plan of salvation. Every single human philosophy follows one of two paths: work righteousness or nihilism. The third path, the path the Scriptures show us, is a plan that has appeared nowhere else in human history, that has occurred to no human mind except through the illumination of God’s Spirit: There is a Savior. Every single other human philosophy is either work-

righteousness or nihilism. But God's Spirit has revealed Good News that there is one who has paid for our sins in full, that God himself became human to suffer with us and for us, that God has freely given us what all the world hungers and thirsts and works and worries for, all of it is freely given us in Christ. ***"We have received... the Spirit... that we may understand what God has freely given us"*** (12). Truly, ***"No [human] mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."***

Not only is this true of how we are saved, it speaks also of something else. Fairly often, people ask me questions about heaven. What will heaven be like? What will we be like? People have real questions about things that make life as they know it livable and enjoyable – Will those things be in heaven? Sometimes the answer is "yes", sometimes it is "no", but almost always it is, "I really don't know." That is an unsatisfying answer. But this is what I do know about heaven, ***"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."*** Heaven will be better than you can imagine. As our hearts were changed when God brought us to faith, so our bodies will be changed when Christ takes us to heaven. Here we have bodies subject to disease, weakness and aging; minds that forget and grow dim. But when God's gives us eternal life, we will be conformed to the perfection that God intended for us. When arrive at heaven, we will see the folly of finishing God's sentences for him.

III. God's Plans Will Draw the World's Criticism

There is one other thing that I need to mention this morning. Throughout this reading, in verses 6 and 7 and 8 and 9 and 12, as I have already mentioned, God's Word tells us that the world's wisdom and God's wisdom are incompatible. They are opposed to each other.

Last week, we considered Paul and Silas in prison. Remember how they, in the worst of times, drew near to God, and how they used that as an opportunity to draw others close to God. When we look at Paul and Silas, we might wonder why we aren't better at doing that. We wonder why we don't find it all that easy to speak, and if we do, to speak convincingly about our Savior. We imagine that we need to pitch it just right, so that the others instantly admit that God's ways are right. Sometimes we have the feeling that if we aren't clever enough, then we have failed.

Our reading has an important insight into this. If worldly wisdom and God's wisdom are incompatible, then we understand why our witness is often not accepted. Paul and Silas may have converted a jailor by speaking of Jesus, but they were beaten up by a crowd for speaking about Jesus.

Speaking about our God, speaking the Holy Spirit's wisdom, is never a failure, no matter how people receive it. Our job is not to convert people – that is the Holy Spirit's job. Our job is simply to speak about our God and our Savior.

Do you remember that musician who stopped by back in September? Just met him again when I was down visiting my parents a couple weeks ago, at a Tuesday concert at their church. Do you remember his testimony? By his own admission he once was an obnoxious argumentative atheist. And do you remember how he became a Christian? He had a neighbor and friend who was a Christian, and he would go over there to argue. But his neighbor would never argue. His neighbor never felt the need to make the perfect pitch or even to convert him. His neighbor just let him know God's will, he took that atheist to God's Word and let the Holy Spirit argue in his heart. And the Holy Spirit (not his neighbor), over the months, won the argument, and Chris woke up one day and said, "It is true! I believe!" Not human wisdom, but the Spirit's wisdom.

So this last point I would make is that when you don't "convince" or "convert" someone, don't worry. That was not your job. That is the Spirit's job. Your only job is to give Jesus the credit due to him – that he is your Savior, and that he has freely given you a wonderful eternity for no other reason than that he has loved you. By speaking God's Word, not human wisdom, you let God finish his sentences, and the Holy Spirit work in hearts. Amen.