

September 13th, 2020

The Wisdom That Was Hidden Before the World Was

1 Corinthians 2:6-10a

The dog who returns to his vomit

One of the glories of Scripture is the earthiness of it. God speaks to us in earthy understandable ways. **Proverbs 26:11** says “Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.” Have you ever seen a dog do that before? The only thing grosser than a dog throwing up, is the dog who returns to eat it. Scripture says that is what a fool is like who continues to return to his foolishness.

The world’s wisdom is doomed

Although Paul doesn’t use that imagery in our text, his imagery is far more sobering. The Corinthian Church was returning to the foolish wisdom of the world. Like the world, they had become self-righteous, factional, and fleshly. Remember that they were dividing themselves up just like the world, **1:12** “... each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” Beginning in **1:18** the Apostle has shown the absurdity of returning to this type of thinking. In our passage this morning, Paul uses his most sobering argument. The wisdom of this age is doomed to pass away (**v.6**). The wisdom of this age is what crucified the Lord of glory (**v.8**). So in essence Paul is asking them: Why would you now return to this worldly-wisdom that has shown itself so foolish?

“Let us go back to Egypt”

Of course there is an immediate application for us. It wasn’t just the Corinthians who returned to the world’s way of thinking, it was also the Israelites before them. Remember what they said after God delivered them from slavery from the hand of Moses? **Numbers 14:4** “Let us choose a leader and go

back to Egypt.” They *ined* for the way the world did things.¹ This is a very real danger that all of us face—the desire to return to Egypt—at least in the way that we think. How do you *think* about your life? What *controls* your decision making process? What do you *feel* you need most? Is it what the world tells you, or what God tells you? How would you finish this sentence: “In order to have a fulfilled life I need _____.” How you answer that question reveals whether you are operating by the world’s wisdom or by God’s wisdom.

The Big Idea...

There are only two types of wisdom: the wisdom of this world which leads to the grave, or the wisdom of God which leads to glory

- ☆ The Wisdom That Is Doomed To Pass Away (v.6)
- ☆ The Wisdom That Was Decreed Before the Ages (v.7-8)
- ☆ The Wisdom That Cannot Be Seen, Heard, or Imagined (v.9)

I. The Wisdom That Is Doomed To Pass Away

Is Paul anti-intellectual?²

It would have been understandable if some people in the Corinthian Church thought that Paul was anti-intellectual because he has completely assaulted wisdom. In **1:18-21** he said that God destroyed wisdom; in **1:22-25** he said that God’s foolishness is wiser than men; in **1:26-31** he said that God chose

¹ Demas in the NT succumbed to this temptation entirely. Paul said in **2 Timothy 4:10** “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.”

² Help in these first few sentences from Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 121

mostly foolish people to be saved; and in **2:1-5** he said that He preached not with plausible words of wisdom. So some may have concluded that Paul was against knowledge, or that he encourages ignorance. Truly many Christians throughout the ages have concluded that to be truly spiritual is to be anti-intellectual. The more knowledge you have, the less spiritual you are. That is tragic, and is not what Paul is saying.

Who are the *mature*?

Notice he begins in **v.6** with the word *Yet*—“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom...” In other words, “though I have *seemingly* spoken so negatively about wisdom, it is in fact wisdom that I preach.” However, the wisdom that he imparts—or teaches—is *only* for the “mature.” Many ancient commentators—Clement, and Chrysostom and Origen believed that the “mature” here are the advanced Christians.³ In other words, Paul did teach true wisdom, but it was only to advanced Christians, and not to immature babes in Christ. Is that what Paul means? No. For two reasons. **First**, this interpretation doesn’t fit in the context. If “mature” means only the advanced Christians, then what is this “wisdom” that he is teaching? He says “Yet among the mature *we do impart wisdom*” If mature means only advanced Christians, then this *wisdom* can’t be the gospel, but it must be some class of higher doctrines. But this *wisdom* can’t mean some class of higher doctrines, because He already told us what this wisdom is. He said in **1:24** that Christ is “...the power of God and *the wisdom of God*.” The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is this *wisdom* that He is preaching. And who does He preach the gospel to? Everyone. Advanced Christians and babes in Christ! Every Christian is a Christian whom Paul imparts this wisdom to.⁴

³ Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 50

⁴ “The New Testament makes no distinction between higher and lower doctrines. It does indeed speak of a distinction between milk and strong meat, but that is a distinction, not between kinds of doctrine, but between one mode of instruction and another. In catechisms designed for children, the church pours all the treasures of her knowledge, but in the form of milk, i.e. in a form adapted to the weakest capacities.” Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 34

The **second** reason why *mature* can't mean only the advanced Christians is because that would mean Paul is teaching that there are different classes of Christians, and elite and a not-so-elite. If Paul did that, then he would be “shooting himself in the foot” in his fight against the factionalism in the Corinthian Church.⁵ You can't fight factionalism with more factionalism.

So then who are these *mature*? Believers. Paul, thus far, has not been contrasting mature believers from immature believers, but rather believers with unbelievers. Therefore, Paul is saying in v.6, “Yet among the mature (those who are saved) we do impart wisdom...” This doesn't mean that Paul is not battling immaturity within the Church at Corinth. Of course He is. Nor does it mean that there are not some believers who are mature and others who are immature. Of course there are. It just means that the contrast *here* in v.6 is between those who have been savingly taught by the Spirit and those who have not.⁶

What is the wisdom of this age?

What is this wisdom he teaches? **First** he says it *negatively*. Halfway through v.6 “...it is *not* a wisdom of this age...” We must affirm here that Paul is not criticizing legitimate human knowledge. The Bible is clear that everything that God has made is an object worthy of our deepest study. **Psalm 111:2** “Great are the works of the Lord, *studied* by all who delight in them.” The reason we have things to study and delight in is because God is the object of all the disciplines. God is the greatest scientist, the greatest architect, mathematician, philosopher—every endeavor to study these things is an endeavor to study Him. So Paul is not criticizing *that type* of human knowledge. Rather he is criticizing the type of human wisdom that is in rebellion against God. The type of human wisdom that has no room for God in it's thoughts (**Psalm 10:4**). The type of

⁵ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 123

⁶ I respect Ciampa & Rosner's position that although Paul is not introducing a new type of status into the Church, he is making a distinction between the mature Christian—those who resist the wisdom of the world, those who refuse to participate in factionalism; and the immature Christian—those who succumb to these things. Although I think this would be a true generally speaking, it seems to me that Paul didn't restrict his teaching to only the former group, but also included the latter.

human wisdom, as **Romans 1:21** says “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.” That is the fundamental sin, the root sin that corrupts all worldly wisdom: ingratitude. The difference between the worldly philosopher and a Christian philosopher is that the Christian understands that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ, while the worldly philosopher sees Christ *at best* as one man among other philosophers. The difference between the worldly scientist and the Christian scientist is that the Christian is in awe of all the laws of physics that God in His infinite wisdom has conceived; *but* the worldly scientist sees only an impersonal abstract force for which he owes no one any praise. The wisdom of this age is a wisdom that has no gratitude, no awe, no humility before God.

The rulers of this age

Paul continues in **v.6** saying nor does he teach the wisdom of “...the rulers of this age...” Paul here includes all the rulers between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ. These are the people who humanity follows—those of great influence, the prominent scientists and politicians, the elite darlings of the world. Why does humanity follow these rulers? Because as Calvin “...they alone appear in the view of the world to be clear-sighted and wise.”⁷ They are the experts. They are the intellectual aristocracy.

1st principle: all worldly wisdom is doomed

But here we arrive at our first principle. The wisdom of this world and all who hold it are destined for destruction. Paul says at the end of **v.6**, that these things are “...are doomed to pass away.” The history of the world proves that God severely judges this rebellion against Him. When Moses warned Pharaoh to let God’s people go so they could worship and serve Him, Pharaoh refused. What was his end? **Exodus 14:27-28** says “the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters...covered the chariots and...all the host of Pharaoh...not one of them remained.” When King Herod, using worldly

⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 105

wisdom, did not give God the glory, "...an angel of the Lord struck him, down... and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last" (**Acts 12:23**). When Belshazzar king of Babylon exercised his worldly wisdom and got drunk using the vessels from the Lord's temple, the prophet Daniel pronounced his doom "... you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven...the God in whose hand is your breath...you have not honored...[therefore] God has...brought it [you and all of Babylon] to an end" (**Daniel 5**). That very night Belshazzar was killed. All who have walk according to the wisdom of this world will be brought to this same fate. **Psalm 37:10** "In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there...[v.20] the wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away...[v.38] transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the wicked shall be cut off."

To those who walk according to the wisdom of this world

That is what your fate is if you have not submitted to the wisdom of the Lord—if you are not a Christian. The same charge against Belshazzar applies to you: "...You have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven—the God in whose hand is your breath...you have not honored. " Perhaps you say "But if I become a Christian, the world will laugh at me, they will think that I am a fool." That is true. They will. But on the day of judgment, it is God who will finally have the last laugh. The Scripture says that "the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming" (**Psalm 37:13**). Dear friend, it's true that the world thinks that the things of God are foolish. That holiness, and peace of conscience, and the worship of God and love of neighbor are trifle things. But what does it offer you as a substitute? Does it offer you wisdom to escape from the wrath to come? Does it offer you wisdom to save your soul when God requires an account for your life? As certainly as judgment came for Pharaoh, and Herod and Belshazzar, it's coming for you. You can't escape it, anymore than you can escape the sun rising tomorrow morning. Each day that passes is one day closer to your final doom. The Scripture offers only one remedy: to flee

to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was crucified for sinners like you, He was put to death for sinners who trust in Him. If you follow your own wisdom you will perish. But if you receive the wisdom He offers you will gain everlasting life. To all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God.⁸ And no child of God will ever perish.

How are we guilty of worldly thinking?

Dear believer, do you see Paul's logic in v.6 for the rest of us? Paul is asking the Corinthians: "Why would you adopt the thinking of the world when it is doomed to pass away?" That question is for us as well. They were guilty of worldly thinking because they were making factions. How are we guilty of worldly thinking? How have we adopted the world's way of thinking in our lives?

Think about your money. What does the world say about your money? "It's yours, you are free to spend it however you see fit." What does God tell us? "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (**Matthew 6:19-20**). Which wisdom is doomed to pass away?

Think about the Lord's Day. What does the world say about the Lord's Day? "Sunday is unimportant, it's just like any other day, and there are far better ways to spend your time." What does God tell us? "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (**Exodus 20:8**). Our Lord Jesus Christ promises to visit us on the Lord's Day: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (**Matthew 18:20**). Which wisdom is doomed to pass away?

Or think about politics. What does the world say about politics? "Everything depends on the election in November. Either America will perish or it will be saved." What does God say? "He removes kings and sets up kings"⁹

⁸ John 1:12

⁹ Daniel 2:21

and “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.”¹⁰ Which wisdom is doomed to pass away?

How the world thinks about everything is diametrically opposed to the way God thinks about it. So beloved test yourself, are you adopting the world’s wisdom or God’s? That’s our **first point**. The wisdom of this world is doomed to pass away.

II. The Wisdom That Was Decreed Before the Ages

Three parts to true wisdom

Paul just showed us what wisdom is *not*. Now he proceeds to show us what true wisdom *is*. Please look at **v.7** with me. “ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” There are three parts to this wisdom: **1)** This wisdom is derived from God. **2)** This wisdom is secret and hidden. **3)** This wisdom is only for God’s people for their glory.¹¹

1. This wisdom is derived from God

v.7 says “But we impart a secret and hidden *wisdom of God*...” This wisdom is *of God*. Meaning it has no human origin. When we preach the Bible, we are *not* claiming that these words found their origin in Paul or Moses or David. **2 Peter 1:21** says “No [Scripture]¹² was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The Bible leaves no room for compromise. It cannot be said that the Bible is filled with many good teachings but is it not God’s word. The Bible claims to be from God Himself. If that is not true, then it is a lie, and all of it ought to be rejected. But

¹⁰ Isaiah 46:10

¹¹ Hodge, pg. 35

¹² original—“prophecy”

if it is from God, then that means everything it claims is true, and whatever we find in the world that is opposed to it must be rejected. That's Paul's first claim. The wisdom we preach comes from God.

2. This wisdom is secret and hidden

Again v.7 says "...we impart a *secret* and *hidden* wisdom." These Greek words are where we get the words apocalypse and mystery. However they don't mean that God's wisdom is puzzling. They mean that God's wisdom has been concealed. Human reason could never discover what this wisdom was. In fact, Plato, humanity's most brilliant philosopher who lived before Christ, once lamented that the only way the world could come to a perfect knowledge of religion is if a future instructor was sent from God.¹³ He said "You may pass the remainder of your days...in despair...if God...does not send you some other instructor." How profound that a pagan philosopher could see the need for a Divine messenger sent from Heaven. Why did he come to that conclusion? Not because God's wisdom is puzzling. But because it is hidden, it is secret, it is concealed from natural man. It can never be known through the wisdom of the world.

3. This wisdom is only for God's people for their glory

Paul finishes v.7 by saying "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, *which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*" What does that mean? It means that God ordained or determined that all His people would come into the knowledge of this secret and hidden wisdom. And that this happened before time itself. This is perhaps the most amazing verse in Paul's letter so far. Before the first minute passed in this universe, when there was no time, when there was no earth, no sun, no moon, no stars; when all there was was God—this infinitely happy and holy God sovereignly purposed that you and I would be taught this secret wisdom and it would be for our glory. When Paul says "our glory" here,

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 478

he means everything that is included in our salvation. Which means that “the preaching of the gospel is the discovery of that wisdom that was hidden before the world was.”¹⁴ The gospel is the great mystery Paul has been speaking about.¹⁵

2nd principle: God’s wisdom ends in glory

Therefore we arrive at our second principle: God’s wisdom leads not only to our salvation but to our glory. Do you see the fundamental contrast between v.6 and v.7? “The wisdom of the great men of the world ends in their destruction (v.6); [but v.7] God’s wisdom leads, not only to our salvation, but to our [everlasting] glory.”¹⁶ Think of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man built his life on the wisdom of this world. But Lazarus had been shown the secret and hidden wisdom of God. How did the rich man live? He lived with no regard to God, rather he lived for himself. Luke’s gospel says he lived “sumptuously every day.”¹⁷ That was the only time that the rich man had peace, for that brief vapor of his life. How did Lazarus live? He loved God and His Christ. However, Luke’s gospel says he was greatly afflicted, he was covered with sores, and the dogs came and licked them. He was so poor that he would have been content to eat the scraps the fell from the rich man’s table. He suffered greatly. But consider, that was the only time that Lazarus would ever suffer in the vast ocean of eternity.

¹⁴ Richard Sibbes, *The Works of Richard Sibbes Vol. IV*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2001), pg. 155

¹⁵ Romans 16:25-26 “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.”

¹⁶ Thomas Charles Edwards, pg. 53

¹⁷ Luke 16:19

The rich man had peace for 70 years *at best*.
 But Lazarus has peace for endless ages.
 The rich man's suffering began on the day of his death.
 But Lazarus was welcomed into everlasting glory
 The rich man has more agony in Hell than he had comfort here
 But Lazarus had more glory in Heaven than misery here

With such a vivid contrast of the two types of wisdom. The rich man lived by worldly wisdom. But Lazarus was given the secret wisdom of God. Who would ever choose the wisdom of this world?

The gospel is hidden from the wise of this world

However Paul's argument is that the gospel is something that is hidden from the wise of this world. Look what he says in **v.8** "None of the rulers of this age understood *this* (that is God's secret wisdom) *for* if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Who are these **rulers**? In **v.6**, Paul included really all the intellectual elites in this age before Christ returns. But here he gets more specific. Here he is at least referring to Jewish high priest Caiaphas and the Roman Governor Pontus Pilate. They, along with many others, were the ones who crucified Christ. The question is, what didn't they understand? It's not that they "...did not cognitively grasp the message, but they did not welcome it personally."¹⁸ Caiaphas knew what Jesus was saying, but he refused to believe it. Pilate knew that Jesus was saying, but it was too far-fetched for him. They did not receive the gospel as true truth. But why? Two reasons.

1. God has hidden it from them

The first reason the wise of this world do not receive the gospel is because God has hidden it from them. The words of **v.7** are emphatic, this wisdom is secret, it's hidden, it can only be understood by the initiated, those whom God decreed to reveal it to. These are the words of Jesus Himself in **Matthew 11:25**

¹⁸ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 126

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.” When King Nebuchadnezzar had that dream of the great image with a head of gold, a chest of silver and so forth, he was greatly troubled, because he did not know what it meant. None of his wise man could give him answers. But then God revealed the mystery to Daniel in a vision. And Daniel came to the king and said in **Daniel 2:30** “...this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living...but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.”¹⁹ God had hidden the dream from Nebuchadnezzar, but had made it known to Daniel. That’s the **first reason** the rulers of this age don’t understand the gospel, because God has hidden it from them.

2. They are willingly ignorant

The second reason they can not understand the gospel is because they are willingly ignorant of it. In other words, they don’t want to understand it. They don’t believe because their hearts are hardened due to sin. **Ephesians 4:18** “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” The greatest proof of their hardened hearts, is that they crucified the Lord of glory. That’s what **v.8** is essentially saying: had they understood the gospel, had they welcomed it with their hearts, they would never have crucified Christ.

The gospel of this world

Dear congregation, do you understand why it’s so difficult for the world to accept the gospel? What is the gospel of this world? The ancient world and the world today have the same basic understanding: both assume “that good people will be rewarded and bad people will be punished.”²⁰ But the gospel says that God only saves bad people. To believe that gospel means that you must admit

¹⁹ v.25

²⁰ Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.,: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 65

that you are a wicked sinner and hopeless without Christ who became your substitute. Christ doesn't save people who think they are good. Jesus said "I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners" (**Mark 2:17**)²¹ "A crucified Savior is a contradiction to someone who thinks that they are basically a good person."²² That's our **second point**. Only for those whom God has shared this secret wisdom before the ages began can ever believe the gospel.

III. The Wisdom That Cannot Be Seen, Heard, or Imagined

"As it is written"

In **v.9** Paul trots out another reason why the wisdom that belongs to this world can not discover the secret wisdom of God. He says "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"

Paul is quoting Isaiah 64:4 with a couple slight variations.²³ But what both Isaiah and Paul assert is that no human being is able to understand the gospel savingly without God's enabling Spirit. That's the subject of **v.9**—the gospel. Some have thought this verse to be speaking about Heaven. But that wouldn't fit the context, Paul hasn't been talking about Heaven. No he's been specifically explaining this secret wisdom that he preaches. **v.7** "But we impart"—that is 'we

²¹ NLT

²² Riddlebarger, pg. 65

²³ There's a bit of ink spilled on Paul's quotation here of the OT, some even speculating that Paul is alluding to multiple texts (including Psalm 31:20; Isaiah 52:15 and 65:17 as well as the one mentioned). Also there is the issue of whether Paul "used" the text correctly. I leave that to the commentators. I agree with what Calvin has said here "Though the words, therefore, are not the same, there is no real difference of meaning." Calvin, pg. 109

preach.” This is something the rulers of this age didn’t understand—**v.8**, and now in **v.9** he’s explaining *why* they don’t understand it. So it could read like this: “...eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the great things that God has laid up in the gospel for those who love him.”²⁴ Of course this includes Heaven, but the proper subject is the world’s to grasp the gospel with their own ability. Notice two things here

1. Paul works by negation

First, Paul works by negation—eye can’t see, ear can’t hear, heart can’t imagine.²⁵ The gospel is so hidden and above man that he restricted in his ability to talk about it. It’s much like how we speak about God. Some of His attributes, we speak of by way of negation: God is immortal (He can’t die); God is infinite (He’s not finite); God is immutable (He can’t change). Likewise here, the gospel is so excellent above man, that we have to start with denials: it’s so excellent that natural eyes, ears, and hearts can’t conceive it.

2. Paul works by progression

Second, Paul works in a progression. He starts with the most basic gate of human knowledge: our sight. Sight is the most basic way we take in information. It is the building block of the scientific method: observation. The gospel is not something that can be understood through sight. Ok, well then what about the next gate of human knowledge: our hearing. Certainly someone could teach us the mystery of the gospel, some great teacher or philosopher. But Paul says no. Finally the last gate of human knowledge: our reason—what the heart can imagine. Certainly, had we enough time we could think and reason our way into understanding this gospel. But again Paul says no. Isn’t this amazing? These three things: sight, sound and reason, represent the way that we understand everything else in this world. But Paul is saying that is not how

²⁴ cf. Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks Vol. II*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2001), pg. 15

²⁵ Sibbes, pg. 156

you understand the gospel. It can't be understood through Empiricism—through sight; not through Sophism—the speech of great philosophers; not through Rationalism—no mind could reason their way to it. How then does one come to believe the gospel?

The Spirit alone reveals it

Paul tells us in **v.10** “...these things God has *revealed* to us through the Spirit.” Or as J.B. Phillips says it in his paraphrase: “But God has, through the Spirit, let us share his secret.” In other words, we do not believe the gospel by the virtue of our own ingenuity. Rather God Himself initiated us into another realm above our seeing, hearing, and reasoning. He revealed, or uncovered truths that we would have never received on our own.

The enchantment of the Godspell²⁶

Children, boys and girls, I wonder if I can help you understand this entire message in a simple illustration. Do you you know how we got the word gospel? It comes from an old English word *godspell*, which is made up of two words *good* (or God) and *spell* (or story). So the gospel is literally “good spell.” Perhaps you remember some of those stories where a wicked witch cast a spell on a princess and it put her to sleep. Or when Gandalf the wizard would cast a spell in Lord of the Rings. What our passage is saying this morning is that the only way a person believes in the gospel is if, to use the word, God puts a “good spell” on us. The clearest example of this in the Bible is when Paul was preaching to a woman name Lydia. And as she sat down next to the riverside listening to Paul, something happened to her. We read in **Acts 16:14** that “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” It wasn't Paul's preaching by itself that made her believe, it was the Lord—He cast a good spell on her as it were. He powerfully opened her heart, in her inner most being, and implanted the secret of His gospel there, and it grew by His Holy Spirit into belief.

²⁶ Help here from Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York, NY.: Viking, 2015), pg. 176

A few queries for our text...

Now how do we know if the Spirit has done this to us?²⁷ Look at the end of v.9 “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*” — Why does Paul say it like that? Why doesn’t he just say ‘for those who believe in him?’ Because loved ones, sometimes faith is hidden. The saints so often are plagued with doubts. A weak Christian sometimes doubts they even believe, and so the root of faith is buried deep in the black soil. But ask him if he loves Jesus. What will a Christian say? Yes I love Him, yes I love His word. Sometimes when a person can’t find their faith, they can find their love.

But you may ask, why does it say “for those who love him?” Should it say “for those whom God loves?” Isn’t God’s love the cause of our love? Yes! 1 **John 4:19** “We love because he first loved us.” So we can with full confidence say that wherever there is true love for the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s love was their first. Our love to God is like the reflection in a mirror. The reflection of a man can only exist if the man is their first. So our love to God can only exist, if God’s love towards us is first.

The omnipotence of gratitude

So how do we apply this passage to our lives? Simply this: gratitude. Gratitude is the most powerful weapon against every vice. Try it. How can you be self-righteous over someone else if you are filled with gratitude towards God? How can you be given over to hatred, or frustration, or cruelty, or to the lusts of the flesh if you are given over to a grateful heart for what the Lord has done for you? What has the Lord done for you? He has *prepared* for you things that eye could not see, ear could not hear, and heart could not imagine. Just as God prepared paradise for Adam before He created Adam, so He prepared a Savior for you long before you ever existed. Don’t you realize that the greatest things take the most preparation. While Solomon was still young, David his father started gathering the stones, and the wood, and all the building materials for the

²⁷ Much help here from Sibbes, pg. 175

temple. And even then, Solomon's temple—the greatest temple ever built—took twenty to build. But dear saint, how much greater is your salvation! How much longer did it take for God to prepare for it? On the last day, we will hear Jesus say to us “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world” (**Matthew 25:34**). That's how long God has been preparing our salvation: from before creation itself. The gospel is the eternal work of God.

The gospel God has prepared

In eternity past, God prepared the gospel for you. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (**Ephesians 1:3-4**).

God prepared the gospel for you in His first promise to fallen man: that the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head (**Genesis 3:15**).

God prepared the gospel for you in His first promise to Abraham, **Genesis 12:3** “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God prepared the gospel for you by sending prophets, priests and kings to Israel, for it would Christ Himself who would be our ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King.

The gospel was prepared for you when “...in the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (**Galatians 4:4**).

And after He rose from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ still prepares the future glories of the gospel for us. **John 14:3** “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Beloved, God has always been preparing the gospel for you.