1 Cor. 2 – The Sacred Secret

We have previously seen in 1 Corinthians …

1 Cor. 1:27,28 REV [My insertions for explanation.]

but God chose the no-good things of the world [us – the Church of Grace] to put to shame those who are wise [said sarcastically], and God chose the weak things of the world [us] to put to shame the things that are strong [said sarcastically],

and the low-born things of the world [us], and the things that are treated with contempt [us]—God has chosen these [us]—and the things that are not [important or valuable – us], to bring to nothing the things that are [in the world’s estimation, supposedly “wise”, “strong”, “important” and “valuable”].

After bringing to mind the value of who God chose us to be and what we’ll do in the future with Christ (like defeating Satan - among other things!), does anyone want to still boast in Paul, Apollos, or Peter? The idea sounds silly now, huh?

1 Cor. 1:29-31

so that no flesh can boast in the presence of God.

And it is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God—and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption,

so that, as it is written, The one who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

Can Paul become wisdom to us? Can Apollos become righteousness to us? Can Peter become holiness or redemption to us? Obviously not! The point is, following or boasting in men is unwise, unless it’s in the one who became much more than a man after he was resurrected and then gifted us these mind-boggling benefits. We should boast – to speak out loud with confidence – in God and His son. Boasting in anyone or anything else is a distraction. To illustrate this, Paul then reminds the Corinthians of their shared history.

1 Cor. 2:1-5

And I, brothers and sisters, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the sacred secret of God.

For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of spirit and of power

so that your trust should not stand in human wisdom, but in the power of God.

Because there was no internet, TV, movies, newspapers, etc., public speaking then was part information sharing and part entertainment. People flocked to it, as we discussed.

After Paul left, Apollos arrived and began preaching, Apollos was not only informative but also persuasively entertaining. The first time we read about Apollos we learn:

Acts 18:24

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, and he was mighty in the scriptures.

Apollos came from one of the great learning centers of the world, Alexandria Egypt. He knew the Old Testament expertly, and was an excellent, enthusiastic public speaker.

Acts 18:25-28

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and having great enthusiasm, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John.

And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.

And when he intended to go across into Achaia [where Corinth was the chief city], the brothers and sisters encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. And when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,

for he powerfully refuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing through the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Apollos refuted the Jews that had expelled Paul from the synagogue. He also showed from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Messiah in the public square among “those who believed through grace” - Gentiles. It was easy for those hearing Apollos speak to venerate this powerful man of God and desire to follow him as was the custom to idolize engaging orators.

In contrast, Paul went out of his way to avoid a personal following. He fostered a “Jesus following”. This is why he didn’t adopt the posture of a dramatic orator like others, but of a humble clear communicator. He avoided coloring the gospel with his personality but exalted God’s instead. He demonstrated God’s spirit and power. How did he do that? Perhaps he and others spoke in tongues, interpreted and prophesied. As he preached, perhaps he also got words of knowledge, wisdom and/or discerning of spirits and performed miracles and healing by faith. He demonstrated the spirit – God’s seal of approval. Many can talk enthusiastically, dramatically, entertainingly, convincingly – but how many can speak in a language they never learned… and then interpret it? Or speak for God in prophesy?

1 Cor. 14:24,25

But if everyone prophesies, and an unbelieving or unlearned one enter, he is convinced by all, he is called to account by all,

the hidden things of his heart are revealed, and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, declaring, “God is truly among you.”

Paul’s words and demonstration pointed to God and Jesus. Why do this? Because the gospel message is so singularly important that any distraction is costly to God and the hearers. Although unseen, there’s a spiritual battle going for the hearers. Add too much “pizzaz” to the gospel and look what Satan did – magnify the talker over the talk! The gospel itself is the essential crucial thing to be shared, not the speaker or delivery method.

Heb. 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even piercing as far as the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to judge the considerations and intentions of the heart.

The gospel of Jesus Christ will be either a steppingstone or a stumbling block depending on the hearer’s heart. A speaker’s oratory will not make or break someone’s eternal destiny, the hearer’s decision about Christ will. Paul knew this and kept it simple and clear.

1 Cor. 2:6

However, we do speak wisdom among those who are mature. But not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

Paul first preached “Jesus Christ and him crucified” to them. This meant he preached the basics of the gospel – Jesus lived sinlessly, suffered, died, was raised from the dead, ascended, and gave the spirit on Pentecost. He taught them the basics of Christianity recorded in the epistle to the Romans. ‘Jesus crucified’ emphasized the loving sacrifice of our lord on our behalf, in some ways encapsulating the gospel. Nonetheless, the gospel is not just information only, it demands practice – doing it. The Epistle of Romans also explains how. We learn more as we walk with the lord than if we just hear it, as we know. After a while we fall as we practice it and get up and walk again… and fall again and get up again… . We mature saints have experienced this reality. We learn the faithfulness of the lord by experience and what the words of God really mean as we become mature and habitual in the lord. Ephesians was written not to the immature or the perfect, but to the faithful in Christ – those who in time are more “in Christ” than “out of Christ”.

Eph. 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the holy and faithful ones in Christ Jesus [in Ephesus]:

The information in Ephesians is meant for those whose habit was Christ. Most of the Corinthians saints were still learning and practicing the basics of Christianity – that they sinned and fell short of God’s glory – that Jesus died instead of them for their sins – that they should walk in grace, love, and trust with God – and all the rest of the foundational doctrine and practice Romans declares. This is what Paul taught for the 18 months he was in Corinth. Regretfully, much of the church was still spiritually immature. They were still “messing their diapers” about leaders and other matters as we shall see. They wanted “wisdom” like their neighbors craved. God in essence is saying, “You want wisdom? We got it, but you must earn the right to it by becoming faithful. You can’t understand My secret wisdom I revealed until you’re habitual at the basics in Christ.” This wisdom is diametrically opposed to the world’s so-called wisdom. It’s also separate from the so-called wisdom of the rulers of this age. Who are they? Are they the great philosophers, or perhaps the emperor Caesar or all the other governmental leaders? Or could they be the evil spirits behind the world systems and their co-called wisdom?

1 Cor. 2:7-8

But we speak God’s wisdom that was kept in a sacred secret, and that has been hidden, which God decided in advance before the ages for our glory,

which none of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Wow! The rulers of this age are not the philosophers. They didn’t crucify Jesus. It isn’t Caesar either or all the world leaders. Only one government guy, Pontius Pilate, was responsible for Jesus’ death. It must be referring to the territorial evil spirits in the world who were at work in the Jewish religious elders and then Pilate from a human political perspective. Is this scripture saying that if these evil powers would have known the wisdom hid by God about Christ that they would rather have him alive and be regularly defeated by him rather than what his death accomplished? Amazingly,… yes!

The Importance of the Sacred Secret

One of the greatest problems of today’s Christian church is its ignorance of this sacred secret. My experience is that the vast majority of Christians and clergy will look at you like you have two heads if you mention to them “the Great Mystery” or “the Sacred Secret”. Our brothers and sisters have no clue about it. It seems that God hid it for millennia and then, after it was revealed, the Devil has been hiding it again! Satan’s vitally interested in us not learning what Christ accomplished for us and in us…and what we are in him… and what we shall be and what we’ll do with him in the future.

Let me say it a different way. Do you know any Christians who think that we – the Church of Grace – will judge the world and defeat Satan? Ask them! Get ready for the “two headed” stare. Is this my imagined idea that we will defeat Satan? Absolutely not! I couldn’t make up something so unmerited and preposterous. But what does God say?

1 Cor. 6:2,3

Or do you not know that the holy ones will judge and administer the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you incompetent to judge the trivial cases?

Do you not know that we will judge and administer angels? How much more, then, things that pertain to this life?

When Satan and his crew killed Jesus, they gave rise to their own judges and executioners! God hid the details of the Sacred Secret so that Satan would be, well, Satan! He actually killed the perfect sacrifice that “took away the sins of the world”, bridging the Satan-caused chasm between God and man. Christ’s death and resurrection helped restore much of what God intended for mankind in the garden and Christ is on his way to restoring it all in time, as so many prophesies foretell. Astoundingly, we will help him do just that, too!

Rom. 8:21

that the creation itself will also be freed from its slavery to corruption and delivered into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The Church epistles are crystal clear - the children of God will free creation from corruption. Who are the children of God? Look in the mirror! The church epistles are loaded with these mind-boggling and knee-buckling statements. These truths were unrelated and unknown to the pre-Pentecost believers. Why? Because God hid them “before the ages for our glory” according to verse 7. Check this out…

1 Pet. 1:10,11

Concerning this salvation, the prophets (who prophesied of the grace that would come to you) searched diligently for and made careful inquiry,

inquiring about what time or what sort of circumstance the spirit of Christ in them was indicating when it testified beforehand about the sufferings appointed for Christ and the glories that would come after them.

God revealed to the ancient prophets that the Messiah (the Seed) would suffer and then be glorified afterward. The only thing that they knew was that between those two events there would be a period of grace for those called by God. What were the specifics of that time? No one knew because God hid it in himself.

1 Cor. 2:9

But as it is written, Things that no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and which have not come up into the heart of man, God prepared those things for those who love him.

Why didn’t God reveal these details to any man? Because if He did, then it would have been available for Satan to learn also, and he wouldn’t have crucified Jesus and condemned himself and his cohorts for eternity. The specifics of the Sacred Secret, or (as many Bible versions translate it) the Great Mystery, are discussed in Ephesians.

Ephesians 3:1-3

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for following Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles….

Surely you have heard of the administration of the grace of God that was given to me for you,

and that the sacred secret was made known to me by revelation, as I have already written about briefly,

Did the Apostle Paul learn of the Sacred Secret from the Old Testament? No, it was not made known pre-Pentecost. Remarkably, it was available to be known on Pentecost, but there was no one around who could receive it yet. Paul finally grew spiritually enough to receive and understand it, but it was perhaps 10-20 years after Pentecost.

Eph. 3:4-6

regarding which, when you read it, you will be able to understand my insight into the sacred secret of Christ,

which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit.

This is the sacred secret: the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise through the good news in connection with Christ Jesus.

God began revealing this one aspect of the Secret to the church after Pentecost (that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews) but it was very reluctantly received, and then only after a contentious Church council in Acts 10-11. This Mystery is so radically different than accepted worldly and even religious wisdom, that it takes considerable spiritual growth before it can begin to be understood. That’s because it’s not physically based at all, but spiritually based, energized, communicated and understood.

1 Cor. 2:10

But God has revealed them to us through the spirit, for the spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

Paul learned the Sacred Secret by revelation from the spirit God gave him in the new birth. As he shared it other apostles and prophets also received this spiritual insight. God had Paul write it down in the epistle to the Ephesians. It opens up to those “faithful in Christ”.

1 Cor. 2:11,12

For who among people knows the things of a person, except the spirit of the person that is in him? Even so the things of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God.

Now we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God, so that we can know the things that were freely given to us by God.

Savor those words - “the things that are freely given to us by God”. One of the astounding realities of the Sacred Secret is that we have been graced “things” by God. What “things”?

1 Cor. 2:13

And we speak about these things, not in words that man’s wisdom teaches, but words that the spirit teaches, combining spiritual things with spiritual words.

The words of the spirit reveal the things God freely gave us. Where is that?

2 Pet. 1:20,21

Know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,

because no prophecy ever came from an act of human will, but people spoke from God as they were moved by holy spirit.

Paul wrote the Church epistles as he was moved (inspired) by the holy spirit.

Eph. 3:4

regarding which, when you read it, you will be able to understand my insight into the sacred secret of Christ,

The words that were inspired by the spirit Paul wrote down, making it possible for those mature and spiritually hungry to understand the Sacred Secret.

One of the great mistakes in Bible translation is dividing the Old and New Testament after Malachi and before Matthew. The four gospels are in many ways the culmination of the Old Testament, the fulfillment of the many ancient prophesies about the Messiah. The true New Testament is what is truly new – what was hidden in God before the ages, began in practice at Pentecost, and then revealed to Paul and documented in the Church epistles. There are too many differences between pre- and post- Pentecost to begin an extended discussion now, but let’s highlight one example. Jesus said …

John 14:17

This helper is the spirit of truth, which the world is not able to receive, because it does not see it or know it. You know it, for it is present with you, and will be in you.

In the Old Testament, the gospels era, the holy spirit was with those whom God chose to have it. In the New Testament, the Church age, the spirit is in us, not with us. In the Old Testament a person could lose the spirit as king Saul did and David begged God not to do. The difference is that the spirit is now part of us. It’s not separate from us – it is us.

1 Thess. 5:23

Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are a whole new species. We are no longer just body and soul – homo sapiens. We are body, soul, and spirit – “holy sapiens”.

2 Cor. 5:17

So then, if anyone is in union with Christ, he is a new creation, the old things have passed away, look, new things have come!

How does this relate to the world and its wisdom? It doesn’t. It’s completely disconnected from the world and its systems. We learn nothing about us being a new creation from the world. We can only learn about it from the Church epistles, and ultimately from the spirit.

Eph. 1:17,18

praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your knowledge of Him

—since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened—so that you will know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance that will be shared among the holy ones,

It takes “spiritual wisdom and revelation to get His knowledge…of His glorious inheritance that will be shared among the holy ones”. God reveals this to us individually. It’s no religion. It’s a relationship. We don’t follow a manual. We follow Emanuel!

Has it hit you yet? True Christianity is almost completely spiritual and only incidentally physical. What do we get when we are saved? A cross necklace? A Gospel of John? No, nothing physical. We get holy spirit. We get born again of God’s spirit.

John 3:5-7

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the Kingdom of God!

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Do not be amazed that I said to you, you must all be born from above.

To continue this theme, God is spirit, as John 4:24 says. Jesus has become a spirit, too.

1 Cor. 15:45

So also it is written, the first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam has become a life-giving spirit.

Perhaps it would be wise to consider Jesus not just a spirit, but a hybrid. We see Jesus after the resurrection walking, talking, and eating – human activity. Then we also see him zipping around, going through walls and instantly disappearing – seemingly spirit enhanced activity. So maybe he’s both, a hybrid. Or maybe I’m spit-balling! (Probably that!) What came on the birthday of the Church, Pentecost?

Acts 2:1,4

And when the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

And they were all filled with holy spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Are you getting the parameters of what Christianity is? God is spirit, Jesus is spirit, we’re born of God’s spirit, we are body, soul, and spirit, we are to walk by the spirit with the manifestations of the spirit and be spiritually minded. This is not primarily a physical endeavor. Too much of what comprises and identifies Christianity today is physical. We go to church on Sunday. We carry a Bible. We wear a cross. We have a bumper sticker on our car. We mouth ‘Christianese’ words. We march against evil stuff. We tithe. Great! That’s all good but where’s the spirit? The answer is usually “crickets”. My perception today is that Christianity is a mostly physical activity, not spiritual – similar to Corinth.

1 Cor. 2:12

Now we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God, so that we can know the things that were freely given to us by God.

God wants us to begin thinking and acting spiritually, “so that we can know the things that were freely given to us by God.” Guess where those things are revealed?

1 Cor. 2:13

And we speak about these things, not in words that man’s wisdom teaches, but words that the spirit teaches, combining spiritual things with spiritual words.

We read the Church epistles to discover our spiritual inheritance. Then we act on what we learn and ask God for help. And He does. We focus on Christ, not Paul or Apollos!

1 Cor. 2:14

But the worldly-minded person does not receive the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

A worldly-minded person – whether saved or not – thinks spiritual things are foolish. But as they begin to trust God and His word, they will begin to develop a spiritual sense, as we did, and start to realize and enjoy the great riches we have been gifted in Christ. You do realize that those riches are … spiritual, right? “Wisdom righteousness, holiness, and redemption” are spiritual rights not physical things. And if you want to tap into what Christ made available to us, we must think spiritually, according to the Sacred Secret and the Church epistles. We can learn to think like Christ, because with God’s spirit, we can!

1 Cor. 2:15,16

Now the spiritual person judges all things, but he himself is judged by no one.

For who has come to know the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

We can pray with confidence and know God hears us. We can ask God for answers and expect a response. We can speak in tongues because “we know not what we should pray for”. We can speak forth words from God that bless, inform, confront and exhort the listeners. We can sense evil and demand interfering demons to go. We can hear from God and trust Him like Jesus did. Why?

1 John 4:17

This is how love has reached its goal with respect to us, so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment: because as he is, so also are we, although still in this world.

As he is, so are we.

