

ONLY GOD CAN TEACH YOU ABOUT HIMSELF!

Today's Text: 1 Cor. 2: 1- 16

Extracts:

But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual [1 Cor. 2: 9-13].

Chanel Preston is one of the biggest porn stars in America.¹ Recently, she opened a business account with City National Bank in Los Angeles. But when she went back a few days later to deposit some cheques, the bank politely told her that her business account had been shut down due to “compliance issues.” Several other performers and insiders in the porn industry have been refused business loans for “moral reasons” that no bank has defined to them. Even a spokesman for the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) has confirmed that (privately-owned) institutes are allowed to make their own calls on who they work with to a certain degree.

On the surface, Preston's case would smell of discrimination. However, if individuals can exercise their freedom of choice, why should institutions (as legal persons) not exercise same? After all, banks are greedy and aggressive when it comes to seeking funds from customers. They do accept porn money for the individual accounts of porn stars without questions. This one is different because the guidelines have been imposed by the moral values of the bank owners. Only such owners can tell you why. So it is with the word of God. Whether you like it or not, whether you accept it or not, only God Himself can tell you what pleases Him and how to convey His word to you. Human wisdom has nothing to do with it. In this week's Bible verses, Paul makes the blunt point that no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. So, why don't we let Him teach us His word His own way? That is the issue that we shall examine in this week's study.

¹ Story based on: Chris Morris, “Banks to porn stars: Your money's not welcome,” *Special to CNBC.com*, Fri., May 17, 2013; <http://www.nbcnews.com/business/banks-porn-stars-your-moneys-not-welcome-1C9967366#>

1. Background: The Holy Spirit is your spiritual Professor!

During His public ministry, Jesus once came into the temple in Jerusalem in the middle of the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles and began to teach. The Jews marvelled and said, "***How does this Man know letters, having never studied?***" [Jn 7: 1-15]. A few years later, after Jesus had died, resurrected and ascended into heaven, two of His disciples, Peter and John, had a confrontation with Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin. They had arrested and kept them in custody overnight on account of the lame man healed at the entrance of the temple [Acts 3: 1-10]. As Peter and John spoke, the Jewish leaders saw their boldness and ***perceiving that "they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled and they realized that they had been with Jesus"*** [Acts 4: 5-13]. In both cases, there is evidence that neither Jesus nor His disciples went to the rabbinical schools of their day, perhaps the equivalent of today's seminaries and Bible colleges. Those were meant for the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes. So, ***who taught Jesus and His disciples the profound words of God that they spoke that have left indelible marks on believers all through history? Paul provides answers in the Second Chapter of his First Letter to the church at Corinth and that is the subject of our study this week.***

We know that Paul studied advanced Judaic theology as a Pharisee, the famous student of a respected doctor of laws, Gamaliel [Acts 22; 3]. In fact, he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries in Israel, "being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of [his] fathers" [Gal. 1: 14]. He wrote 13 (almost half) of the 27 books in the New Testament. Yet, he says, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For ***I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified***" [1 Cor. 2: 1]. So, where did Paul get his spiritual schooling? Here are some clues from this week's Bible verses:

a) *Paul did not rely on human wisdom*

Paul writes, "***We speak wisdom*** among those who are mature, ***yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age***, who are coming for nothing" [v. 6]. Elsewhere, he adds, "When it pleased God ... to reveal His Son in me, that I should preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days" [Gal. 1: 16-18]. Peter attests to the wisdom given to "our beloved brother Paul" whose epistles contain "some things hard to understand" [2 Pet. 3: 15-16]. Therefore, Paul did not rely on human wisdom for His knowledge of God and His Christ.

b) *Spiritual truths are revealed by God*

Paul writes, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” [1 Cor. 2: 7]. In other words, spiritual truths can only come from God, not from man. For example, Agur, the son of Jakeh, asked Ithiel and Ucal, “Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?...Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and His Son’s name, if you know?” [Prov. 30: 1-4]. Thousands of years later, Jesus Himself answered that question when He told Nicodemus, a Jewish leader that came by night to see Him, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [Jn 3: 13-15]. Indeed, *only God can reveal to us spiritual truths about Himself for “the secret things belong to the LORD, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever”* [Deut. 29: 29].

c) *Revealed things are taught in words given by the Holy Spirit*

Quoting the prophet Isaiah [Is. 64: 4], Paul reminds us that we do not have enough human capacity (eyes, ears or comprehension) to appreciate the things that God has prepared for those who love Him “but God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.... *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God*” [1 Cor. 2: 9-12].

How do we know it is the Spirit of God that is speaking to us? The Scriptures have confirmed that in times past, God spoke in various ways to the fathers by the prophets and in the last days by His Son, Jesus Christ [Heb. 1: 1-2], “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” [Rev. 19: 10]. For example, when Miriam and Aaron criticized their brother, Moses, behind his back for marrying an Ethiopian wife, God called them out to the tabernacle of meeting. He came down “in a pillar of cloud” that stood in the door of the tabernacle and said to them, “If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a *vision*; I speak to him in a *dream*. Not so with My servant Moses. He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him *face to face*, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD” [Num. 12: 1-8]. On Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit manifested Himself through the disciples *speaking in other tongues*, tongues of men and not of angels [Acts 2: 4]. Nine manifestations of the Holy Spirit are detailed in Paul’s first epistle to the church at Corinth, and *the Holy Spirit distributes them to individuals “as He wills”* [1 Cor. 12: 4-11]. That is why it is said that the Holy Spirit comes by inspiration, not by divination [Acts 16: 16].

d) *Only those with the mind of Christ can spiritually discern revealed things*

Paul also makes the important point that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God because they look foolish to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. ***Only those who have the mind of Christ can know the mind of God, and that privilege is for true believers [1 Cor. 2: 14-16].*** This point is well articulated in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy where he said [2 Tim. 3: 14-16]:

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In sum, Paul is reminding true believers that Jesus Christ is the anchor of their faith. The words that He speaks are "spirit and they are life" and it is the Holy Spirit that gives life [Jn 6: 38]. Therefore, you should not lean on your own or any human understanding. In all your ways, you should acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths [Prov. 3: 5-6]. That is the meat of Paul's message.

2. Identify your own student record

Let us subject your "report card" to scrutiny in the light of our analysis so far. Which "school" have you attended (or are attending) in anchoring your faith? After all, everyone of the world's current population of over six billion people has faith but not on the same person or place or thing. ***In general, people's faith is measured more by their motives and goals than by knowledge of the truth.*** In that light, the following kinds of students can be found in our congregations:

a) *You may still be an academic!*

Some of us are ***very deep in the knowledge of the word of God but only in an academic sense.*** They will go to the best colleges and seminaries and obtain the highest academic qualifications with which to decorate their names and business cards. However, when they open their mouths to preach or teach the word of God, you easily know that they are trying to impress their audience. There is no evidence of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in their carriage and output. Such people are still ***mere academics and theologians!***

Take the case of Apollos, "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures." He was said to have been "instructed in the way of the Lord" and "fervent in spirit." When he came to the synagogue at Ephesus, he spoke "boldly," and "taught accurately the things of the Lord." Yet, when Aquila and his

wife, Priscilla, heard him, “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God *more accurately*.” Before then, his faith had been anchored on the baptism of John. After the Holy Spirit-led updating from Aquila and Priscilla, he crossed over to Achaia where “he greatly helped those who had believed through grace” [Acts 18: 23-28]. That was the same Apollos that Paul would later commend as follows: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” [1 Cor. 3: 6].

So, if you find yourself sounding academic in the word of the Lord, *put away your garment of self-worth or self-importance and learn from Christ’s humility* where He said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” [Jn 5: 30]. If you love Him and keep His commandments, *He will pray the Father and he will give you another Helper, “the Spirit of truth” who will dwell with you and be in you* [Jn 14; 15-17].

b) *Or a business person*

Some people are very gifted in the word of God in that miracles and testimonies easily follow their crusades and other services. Sooner than later, however, their *pecuniary motive* begins to manifest itself. They begin to ask for specific amounts or items for thanks offering. They begin to be secretive about the assembly’s accounts, by putting only their family members or lackeys in charge, thus calling to question their transparency and the integrity of their work.

In Paul’s warnings to young Timothy on how to be a good minister, he reminded him that those who desire to be rich easily fall into temptation and a snare and “into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Greed has made many stray from their faith “and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Therefore, true men and women of God should flee such things and “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience [and] gentleness” [1 Tim. 6: 9-11].

c) *Or even an idol-worshipper*

Some men and women of God cannot stand competition from other gifted people within their congregations. Therefore, they will do anything to clip their wings or force them out. Some people who do not want to go may then begin to treat such leaders as their idols. They will do whatever they ask for, and even imitate their mannerisms of speech, clothing, hairstyle, etc! Both groups are idle-worshippers- the leaders, their egos; the followers, their leaders.

Take the case of the church in Thyatira. Their works, love, service, faith and patience were commendable to the Lord. Yet, the assembly allowed a

woman with the Jezebel spirit who called herself a prophetess “to teach and seduce” top members of that church to commit sexual immorality, “and she did not repent.” The Christ “who searches the minds and hearts” will judge members of that church according to their works [**Rev. 2; 18-24**]. Therefore, *following Christ by the leading of the Holy Spirit is the only way to avoid idolatry and hypocrisy.*

d) *But be Spirit-led*

Paul asked the church at Corinth, “Who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” and he answered it, “But we have the mind of Christ” [**1 Cor. 2: 16**]. We know that nobody can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12; 3**]. Jesus is called the Word of God [**Rev. 19: 13**], and His true followers have His testimony, and the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy [**v. 10**]. Therefore, *you have to be Spirit-led if you want to have the mind of Christ. It is a mind of humility, and total obedience to the will of God, even to the point of death* [**Phil. 2: 5-11**].

To be Spirit-led is to walk by faith and not by sight so that you can remain on the narrow and tortuous road to eternal salvation in heaven. That is what God has taught us about Himself and His word. You cannot learn that from any human academy except from the hard school of holy living. That is Paul’s message for us all.

3. Conclusion: Only Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God!

No one has seen God at any time but Jesus, who is in the bosom of His Father, has declared Him [**Jn 1: 18**]. Therefore, if you have seen Jesus, the visible image of the invisible God, you have seen His Father [**Jn 14: 9; Col. 1: 15**]. When you believe in Him and accept Him as your Lord and Saviour, you become sons of God who “has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” [**Gal. 4; 6**]. That is all that matters!

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