



# THE PARADOX OF FAITH

*“14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”*

- 1 Corinthians 2:14-16

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## **The Paradox of Faith**

In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 in verse 14, the apostle Paul says a natural man - that's a man in his natural condition, an unspiritual man, a man outside the kingdom of God, an unregenerate man, an unconverted man or woman, for that matter - does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.

And it isn't just that they don't accept them, it is that they are foolish to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised or spiritually examined. Now, this is a reality. Unconverted people look at the cross, look at the Christian gospel, the Christian faith, and it appears as foolishness to them. Of course, they are spiritually dead in trespasses and sin.

They are spiritually blind, blinded by the God of this world, blinded by their own sinfulness. They are deaf to the voice of God. They are ignorant of their condition and of the truth of God, and so the gospel appears to them to be foolish. Even when they would study it, perhaps with some vigor, it might continue to look foolish to them because in the gospel message, there are contained so many contrasts.

What are the things that make the gospel appear foolish. Things like this: A king who becomes a servant. A king who exchanges the crown of glory for a crown of thorns. The eternal God, who fills all the vastness of the limitless universe, confined to a human body. The God who is outside time, the Creator of time, subject to 33 years of life. The eternal giver of life who dies.

On the surface, all of that seems paradoxical, if not downright contradictory. The righteous judge - the holy and righteous judge - who becomes the guilty criminal's advocate. The holy executioner of sinners who becomes the Savior of sinners. The God who measures all men against the perfection of His law and decides to forgive sinners all the violations.

And it isn't just those matters which have to do with God that appear so contradictory and so difficult, it is matters that have to do with God's revelation. God has given us Scripture, and

Scripture is a law which provides complete freedom from sin. And the truth of Scripture is freedom which is a form of slavery to righteousness. Even when you look at believers' lives, we are enemies who become sons. We are outcasts who become aristocrats. We are the poor who become rich. We are the bankrupt who are made joint heirs with Christ and will inherit all eternal glories.

We are the criminals who become judges. We are the haters of God who become the lovers of God. We are the ones God hates and then loves. We are souls born twice. We are dying people who live forever. We live lives subject to death and yet we conquer death. We are the constantly defeated who become more than conquerors. We are heroes who rejoice in our weaknesses. We are the world's despised whom the Lord honors forever. We are part of a kingdom on earth that has a capital city in heaven. We are just a humble little flock and yet we are kings and priests unto our God. And all of this, for us, is made possible by the humanly incomprehensible reality that the giver of life gave up His life that the dead might live.

Now, there are many other things that could be said, and I'm working on another list, but therein lies something of the apparent paradoxical nature of our faith. And a natural person looking at that, hearing me say all of this, could easily be mystified. People cannot understand the gospel. The natural man cannot understand it, and it appears to him to be foolish, contradictory, unreasonable, illogical because it is spiritually discerned, and he is spiritually dead. But I would venture to say that you all understood everything I was saying, didn't you?

You understand all of that because you understand the gospel. It isn't that you're so brilliant that you understand it, it is - as it says in verse 14 - it is spiritually examined. And then verse 15, "He who is spiritual appraises all things." He who is spiritual is that one who has come out of that natural condition into a spiritual life by virtue of the mighty work of God in his soul or her soul. And for those of us who have received that work of God and been made alive and had the blinders taken off so that we could see and our ears unstopped so that we could hear, and our minds opened so that we could understand, for us, we have (verse 16 says) the mind of Christ.

To me, that is as magnanimous a statement as can be made in Scripture about believers. We have the mind of Christ. We can understand all about a king who became a servant, all about that king who exchanged a crown of glory for a crown of thorns. We can understand the eternal God who dies and is the giver of all life. The righteous judge who becomes the criminal's advocate, the holy executioner of sinners who becomes their Savior, we can understand that. We can understand a law that provides freedom from sin and a freedom that is slavery to righteousness.

We understand what it means to be an aristocrat when you were an outcast, a son when once you were an enemy, the heir of eternal glory when once you were bankrupt. Rich when you were poor. A judge when you were a criminal. A friend of God when once you were His enemy; beloved of God when once hated. We can understand what it means to be born twice. We can understand that we are, though dying in this world, going to live forever. And though in the physical realm, death conquers; in the spiritual realm, life conquers. We know what it is to be constantly defeated and yet more than conquerors through Christ.

And we know what it is to be a hero because we rejoice in our weaknesses. We understand that we are but a little fly, and yet kings and priests to God, part of a heavenly kingdom on earth with a capital city in heaven. And we understand that because we understand the great gospel truth that the giver of life gave up His life that the dead might live.

Now, all of that is basic to us. That is the glory of the kingdom, its incomprehensibility to anybody who doesn't have the mind of Christ, doesn't think that way. What a privilege has been granted to all of us who are believers to have been given the mind of Christ. Now, I don't want to lead you into some kind of mystical assumptions about the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ is this book. You know, there are many who would talk about the mind of Christ, and they would assume that having the mind of Christ is some mystical experience in which you are sort of transcendently led into thinking the way Jesus thinks.

Or some would say today that having the mind of Christ means you get prophecies from Christ or revelations from Christ, and you articulate them. That's not what it means. To have the mind of Christ means to think the way He thinks. And we know exactly how He thinks because He's revealed what He thinks here. Is that not true? Is this the Word of God? Is Christ God? Then this is the Word of God, the Word of Christ. That's why Paul in Colossians

said, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you" - what? - "richly." As the Word of Christ dwells in you richly, you have the mind of Christ.

And those things that appear to be conundrums, those things that appear to be paradoxes, those things that appear to be contradictions, those things that appear to be mysteries are very clear to us because the Lord has transformed our lives and opened our minds to the wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Really, all of the incredible glories of the kingdom, many more than I've mentioned to you tonight, take us back to one great reality, and that is the cross. Because it's when you look at the cross that you see it all come together. There, the eternal God, the giver of life, dies. There, the great judge becomes the criminal's advocate - actually becomes the criminal's substitute. There, the great executioner becomes the great Savior and so forth. And it is in that act on the cross that enemies become friends and rebels become sons, and haters of God become lovers of God and so forth and so forth.

It is that credible glory of the cross that permeates all other elements of the gospel and of the Christian faith. It's critical for us to understand that we have, in having the Word of God, access to these immense glories. They are not available to the unconverted - not at all.

Back in chapter 1, verse 18, 1 Corinthians, "The Word of the cross," Paul says, "is, to those who are perishing, foolishness." There's the same idea again. People who don't know the Lord, who don't have a spiritual life, who are in their natural condition, look at this as absolute foolishness. But to us, who are being saved, going from justification through sanctification to glorification, it is the power of God. In the end, verse 19 says, "The wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever will be destroyed."

The wisest and the most educated and the most profound in the world can make no contribution to ultimate spiritual truth. "Where is the wise man?" - verse 20 - "Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" And in verse 21, this is why the wisdom of the world is so useless, because "in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't come to know God." You can take all the brain trusts of the history of humanity, and they can't collectively or individually come to know God. The only way to come to know God, it says in that same verse, "God was well

pleased through the foolishness of the gospel or the message preached to save those who believe.”

And that’s why, down in chapter 2, verse 1, Paul says, “When I came, brethren, I didn’t come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. I just determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him” - what? - “crucified.” It’s that gospel that saves. It’s that gospel that gives life. It’s that gospel that brings transformation. It’s the gospel of the cross. And when the transformation comes, then all these mysteries that we’ve talked about become clear, because we receive the mind of Christ.

It really is an immense reality to think about. We know how God thinks - we know how God thinks. We know how Christ thinks because the pages of Scripture reveal it. What God says reflects what God thinks, and that is precisely what the Scripture is.

Matthew 4:4 says, “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Think like God is a Christian concept that refers to adopting the mindset of Jesus Christ. The idea is that thinking like God will lead to living like God and ultimately being able to do what God does.

### **How to think like God**

- **Know God's purpose:** Understand God's plan for your life
- **Depend on God:** Trust in God's power instead of your own
- **Forgive:** Forgive those who have hurt you
- **Be willing to sacrifice:** Be willing to sacrifice for others
- **Let God guide you:** Allow God to help you choose your words and make decisions
- **Study the Bible:** Search the scriptures to learn how God sees you and what he expects of you
- **Let God define you:** Allow the Word of God to determine how you think