

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 (1 Corinthians 2:6-13)

Do You Know the Secret?

Can you keep a secret? How many secrets do you know? Secrets fascinate us. Think how many movies revolve around a secret message or a deep, dark, family secret or a secret plan. Of course, the essence of a secret is that it's something other people don't know. Usually, that means that some people are keeping that information to themselves. Sometimes, we kind of make a joke out of that. If you're working on your computer and you can't get some online form to work, you might ask someone, "Do you know the secret to making this work?" You don't actually mean they're trying to keep the information private, but at least in your case, that's what they've succeeded in doing. This morning, God's word talks to us about a secret, about something that no one can know unless they're told. My friends, **do you know the secret?**

I.

Of course, it's not just anybody's secret that St. Paul was talking about. Paul is talking about God's secret. But it is a secret that deals with us. It's all about what God plans to do with us and for us. **Do you know the secret of what God has planned for us?**

Of course you do, just like the people Paul was writing to did. But you didn't always. Nobody did. The secret of God is true wisdom – but it's a different kind of wisdom. It's not what the rulers or the influential people in this world consider to be wisdom. So it's not the things that we pick up from our society. What is wisdom? It's different from being smart. I know some really smart people who aren't particularly wise. Our world makes that distinction, too. It thinks of wisdom in terms of common sense. It thinks of wisdom in terms of relationships and emotional intelligence. There is truth in that. Those things are important and they have a place in our work as a church. But none of it is the wisdom Paul was talking about this morning because all those things are available to everyone, believer and unbeliever alike. Paul says, **"We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began."**

Wisdom is understanding and being able to apply what you understand in the world around you. That's true even in this world. But God's wisdom is understanding things on a spiritual level and being able to apply those spiritual insights to our lives here and in the world to come. Why would God hide his wisdom? The truth is, he didn't hide it. We did. Or rather, the sinful nature that we were born with hides God's wisdom. What I mean is, the way God looks at things is so different from the way that we look at things that true understanding is hidden from us. It's a secret until God explains it to us. He does that through the gospel.

What is that secret wisdom? Paul says, **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."** God has prepared something for us. We usually call it heaven. What does he mean when he says that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what that will be? Obviously, none of us has ever been there. So we really can't conceive of what heaven will be like. We live in a world that's tortured by sin. Our own sin and the sin of the people around us cause us pain.

The sin of people we love can cause us the greatest grief. But we also suffer from the sins of people who don't like us. We have to live every day with the consequences of the sins of people we don't even know. You pay more every time you buy groceries because some people steal from the store. You worry about taxes and war and crime because of the sinful lusts of people you've never met. What would it be like to live in a world where no one ever makes my life harder? Where I live in perfect harmony with all those who are there with me? What would it be like to live in a world where the people I love never hurt me? Even more than that, what would it be like to live in a world where I never sin? Where I never hurt anyone else? Where I never lust or covet or hate? Where I never make my own life harder and where I never hurt those I love most of all? That's what heaven is going to be like and it's impossible for us to completely imagine it here.

And yet, St. Paul goes on to say, **“But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”** How can no mind know what's coming and yet it be revealed to us? Because Paul is talking about more than just being able to imagine heaven. He's talking about understanding all that God did for us in Christ. That begins with understanding what we are. No one can really get a good grasp on what we are except through God's working. God says nothing good lives in our sinful nature. Now, in the past, that insight got twisted into thinking that matter itself was bad. So we're just trapped here until we go to a higher existence. Sometimes, you hear that kind of thing today. Many times, even at funerals today, you don't hear that the dead person is going to rise. You hear only about heaven. But going to heaven is not all that God has prepared for us. Jesus is going to return and raise the dead and renew the world. Part of what we can't imagine is this world the way God designed it to be. That's what's coming. But the other, more common failing today is to argue that we're all basically good people and we deserve to go to heaven. Or at least, we all deserve to be forgiven. That's just not true. God says we're dead in our sin, that nothing good lives in us the way we were born. No one can grasp that without the Holy Spirit's help.

But there's an even greater part of the secret God wants to reveal: God still wants us to have the unimaginable heaven and that incomprehensible new heavens and new earth. So he sent Jesus to win it for us. Jesus died for all that sin that still sticks inside us, the sin that still rears its ugly head every single day. Jesus died and he paid for it all. Jesus washed the sin away in his blood. He took God's records of all our sins and Jesus used his blood to erase every trace of that record. In its place, he wrote his own perfect life. So that's what God gives us credit for. Jesus rose to tell us that. We will go to heaven and we will rise from the dead if we die before Jesus comes back. God has revealed that much to us.

The Holy Spirit tells us even more. He tells us that our new life will be without pain or sorrow or death. He tells us we will be with Jesus every single day. He tells us we will spend eternity celebrating his love. Now, what that will be like is still beyond our limited, sinful minds. But the Holy Spirit has told us as much as we need to know. He has revealed the secret of what God has planned for us – at least as much as we can understand.

II.

That might bother someone. But it shouldn't. We do that sort of thing all the time. When a small child's mom is pregnant, she often tells him or her that the baby is in her tummy. Now, strictly speaking, it isn't in her stomach; it's in her womb. But a little child doesn't know that much anatomy. And he or she certainly doesn't need to know how it got there. Within those limitations, the mom has revealed a secret to her child. Within our limitations, God has told us the secret. But why is it so hard? We aren't children. Many of you are not just wise, but smart. So why doesn't God give us more information? Because the information is coming from a source that is so great that even in heaven, we will not understand close to all of it. It comes from God himself. That's why it has to be a secret. It's beyond all human telling. **Do you know the secret that comes from the heart of God?**

Of course, you do. Not because I told you. Not because your parents or your teachers or other pastors told you. God used all those people, it's true. But he gave the message to them, too, in his word. Paul reminds us that the Bible is the gift of the Holy Spirit. He gave every word of it to the men who wrote it so that we can know the secret. That teaching is so important because that information comes from God. If the Holy Spirit didn't spell it out just right, we would absolutely mess it up. We would be like a small child trying to explain nuclear physics. So God tells us exactly what we need to know.

Paul says, **“The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”** He uses the example of our own spirits. Do you tell anyone everything? Every one of us has thoughts that we don't express. Everyone

one of us has feelings that we don't even completely understand sometimes. There is a part of all of us that no one else sees. But our spirit – our soul – knows that part of us. Just as we have an inner being who knows what goes in our minds and hearts, the Holy Spirit knows the mind and heart of God. He can search the infinite and the eternal because he is God himself.

St. Paul says, **“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.”** Not completely or perfectly in this life, certainly. But God does this miracle. He shows us the infinite. He lets us glimpse into his eternal plans to make the world, to claim us as his children, to enter the world in the womb of the Virgin Mary, to redeem the world with Jesus' blood, and to bring us home to heaven. To do that miracle, the Holy Spirit doesn't just have to know the mind of God; he has to know our minds, too. He has to know what we can understand and what we can't. He carefully fed just exactly that much to all those Old and New Testament writers. But it's even greater than that. He has to know you and me personally. He had to reach into our hearts and give us faith. He has to dole out his word, his law and his gospel, his insights and miracles, piece by piece so that we grow in our understanding and faith.

A few weeks ago, we had a pastor come and give a seminar on strategic planning here at Peace. He has an associate pastor in his congregation so that he can travel to churches like ours. You know what? I confirmed his associate. He grew up at my previous congregation and I took him through catechism class and listened to his promise to be faithful unto death and laid my hands on his head just like I do here every spring. Now, on the day I confirmed him, was he ready to preach a sermon? No. He was a bright kid. But God had to grow his faith. The Holy Spirit had to come to him in the law and the gospel countless times, to give him the knowledge and insight he needs to proclaim God's word to God's people. I'm sure that if I went to his church today, I would hear a sermon that would strengthen my faith. But I didn't get him there. God did.

The Holy Spirit works in all of us that way. The 8th graders I have in catechism class now were in preschool when I came to be your pastor. Their teachers taught them the good news about Jesus year after year, and today, when I have them in the class, they are so much more mature in knowledge than they were ten years ago. You and I have spent these ten years growing together in the word, too. God willing, we'll continue to grow together. Paul points out that now we express spiritual things in spiritual words. You don't have to become a pastor to speak these truths. God teaches us a new vocabulary. God teaches us more than that. He makes us spiritual people with new minds and new hearts. We have a message to share with each other and with the world: the good news about Jesus.

Every time we go back to the word, we're going back to the Holy Spirit who plumbed the mind of God and then gave us a word that we can understand and cling to. If he hadn't done that, it would all still be a secret. Even in heaven, we are going to need him to share God's secrets with us because we're aren't going to become God. We'll still be people. But holy people, living with Jesus and wondering at his love every day for all eternity. That's God's plan for us. It is too wonderful to comprehend. Yet, it so simple, even a child can understand it. Cling to what he has prepared for you. Amen.