

Led By The Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Have you ever needed to do something that, no matter how much you tried to do it by yourself, you just couldn't complete it? In other words, you just needed help. My brother, Derek, and I have been working on our own cars since we started driving. One time, I had to change the brakes on my car and ended up needing to bleed the hydraulic brake system. Which shouldn't have taken me all that long, but no matter what I did, I just couldn't get all of the air out of the lines. This is not a good thing, and the car wasn't safe to drive. So, after a foolishly long time struggling on my own, I called Derek for help. Now, you have to know this about my brother, he is a world-class mechanic! Here's how it went. Derek arrived, showed me a trick that required two sets of hands, and thirty minutes later, I had perfectly bled brakes on my very old car! The next time I ran into a jam, you can bet I called him right away instead of struggling and struggling.

See, the thing is that we don't only do this with pragmatic problems in our lives, but we do it spiritually as well. We try to live moral, noble, or spiritual lives by our own strength. We try to become more patient and gentle people, or we try to have victory over persistent struggles by willing ourselves to simply do and be better. We might have momentary wins, but nothing that lasts. Before too long, we are back at square one, feeling defeated and deflated. The thing is, we were never meant to try to live the Christian life on our own. God has indwelled each believer with his Spirit to help the believer grow in conformity with Christ. In other words, we need help to live the Christian life. God knew that and graciously gave us all that we needed in the indwelling of his Spirit! That is exactly Paul's reminder to the Corinthian church in chapter two. He's already diagnosed their problem of pride and divisions that were rooted in the pursuit of wisdom by their own strength. He goes on in chapter three to tell them that they are a bunch of babies, literally! But before he does that, he reminds them that God has given them his Spirit to help them grow and become like Christ. In fact, by God's Spirit, they have been given the mind of Christ! The world's wisdom and way of thinking no longer is to define them or to be found in their community. But this is hard. You and I know this intellectually and personally. That is why it is such good news that God wants to help us. And it is important for us to understand that, **God's people are led by God's Spirit.**

1. Humble Paul

a. Paul's genuine humility – Jesus and Jesus alone.

- i. The subject moves from the calling of the Corinthians (1:26–31) to the preaching of Paul. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he eschewed rhetorical virtuosity. He was determined to focus only on Jesus as the crucified Lord. He was even fearful that he would rely on himself instead of on the grace of God. Hence, he did not use the kind of rhetoric that dazzled crowds in the Graeco-Roman world. He relied on the Spirit and the power of the cross. Paul acted in this way so that the Corinthians' faith might rest not on human wisdom but on God's power.¹
 - ii. If we rewind back to Acts 18, we begin to understand what Paul is talking about in verse 3. → **"And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling..."**
 1. Paul wasn't giving a false humility here in the letter to the Corinthians. Nor was he conjuring up some act when he went to Corinth in the first place. He faced very real pressures and problems in Corinth and he needed God's help to engage faithfully in the mission God had called him into.
 2. Paul's words here are genuine. He was a good pastor, preacher, and missionary. He knew what they needed, understood their cultural so as to say in a way that landed, and relied on God to do the work.
 - iii. Acts 18:5-10 → ⁵When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹**And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."**
- b. The whole point of Paul's approach was that they would be able to discern between their cultural expectations and the power of the cross.
- i. V. 4 - Given Paul's desire for the medium to match the message, his preaching was not characterized by *wise and persuasive words*. The target once again is Greek rhetoric. Litfin says that Paul did not attempt to persuade his hearers, but such a judgment does not get it quite right. Paul, according to Acts, did try to persuade his hearers to believe (Acts 18:4, 13; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23). **What he rejected was trying to persuade people in the wrong way. Paul did not want the Corinthians to be so entranced with the style and flair of his discourse that they found themselves accepting what Paul said for stylistic instead of substantive reasons.** Hence Paul relied instead on the power of the Spirit in his preaching.²

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 76–77.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 78.

1. In other words, Paul understood their cultural expectations, prepared thoughtfully, and fully relied on God's power.
- ii. **What are our cultural expectations? → Being polite and neat ordered lives.**
 1. How can we distinguish our lives in Christ with the norms of our culture, even when they look similar?
 - a. **Priorities** – (Pressure)
 - i. **What is the main thing of our lives?** - When we have this sorted and fixed on Christ it helps us to live less frantic lives and resist the pressures of our culture. Especially material pressures.
 - b. **Expectations** – (Problem of evil)
 - i. **What do we think we deserve?** – We live in a broken world that will only become truly whole once Christ returns. This truth actually sets us up to live with appropriate expectations of ourselves and others.
 - c. **Motivations** – Being a good person or love received?
 - i. **What drives my actions?** -
- iii. If our lives are to be a billboard, then the how of our lives matters as much as the what of our lives.
 1. One of the markers of the Christian life is that we are to be led by the Spirit of God.

2. The Spirit of God

- a. Essential functions of the Spirit (cf. Jn. 16:5-15)
 - i. Makes God known... I.e., God is not hidden from us.
 - ii. Helps humanity know the thoughts of God. – I.e., Hear from God.
 - iii. Teaches us all we need to know about God.
 1. Believers, therefore, understand the things of God precisely because the Spirit has been granted to them, and the things of the Spirit have been communicated in words that come from the Spirit. Unbelievers, those without the Spirit, do not welcome the things of the Spirit, for to them the things of the Spirit are foolish. Only those who have the Spirit understand the things of the Spirit. The ability to assess reality, then, is not a native capacity for human beings but derives from the Spirit. **Believers understand the mind of the Lord only because they have the mind of Christ. To sum up: God's wisdom has been granted to believers, but the wisdom believers have is not *discovered* by them but *revealed* to them.**³
 - iv. V. 14 - By way of contrast, *the person without the Spirit*—that is, 'the natural person' (*psychikos anthrōpos*, ESV)—does not welcome the words that come from the Holy Spirit. The 'natural person' refers here to unbelievers since, as noted previously, a Christian, by definition, is a person of the Spirit (cf. Jas 3:15; Jude 19). Paul's message is not like the mystery religions in which truth is conveyed only to the elite. **Instead, those who do not believe also hear the things of the Spirit, but they do not *accept* them because the message is deemed to be foolish.** It is not that unbelievers cannot mentally

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 79.

grasp or comprehend the message of the gospel. **Paul's point is that they do not welcome or receive the message because it strikes them as manifestly untrue. In other words, unbelievers do not grasp the significance of the message proclaimed.** Indeed, they are unable to understand the truth and significance of the gospel because such things can be *discerned only through the Spirit*. Human beings lack the innate capacity to appreciate and receive spiritual truths; only those who have the Holy Spirit can grasp the things of the Spirit.⁴

b. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is indwelt in believers?

- i. Here is what Paul tells the church in Corinth.
 1. **¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.** – 1 Cor. 3:16-17
- ii. Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit lives in, resides in, or has made a home in the believer. In this way, the Spirit is not some abstract universal force that is somewhere out there that the believer must search for or conjure up to access. Instead, the Spirit is in and is active in the life of the believer.
 1. Paul gives a picture of the Temple here: The Temple was the place the God physical dwelled on earth. Now, Paul says God dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit. What God once did through a building he now does in the believer.
- iii. The Spirit is the power of the coming age (Heb. 6:4-5), a source of divine life, the animating force in Jesus' own resurrection glory. **"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit, who lives in you"** (Rom. 8:11). **By the indwelling Spirit the believer enters into a new life, one that will come to fulfillment when Christ returns. In this sense, through the Holy Spirit, God has "set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come"** (2 Cor. 1:22; cf. Eph. 1:13; Eph. 4:30).⁵
- iv. **Caution – What does indwelling not mean?**
 1. **It must be emphasized that our union with Christ does not mean that we somehow become God—that we are joined to the divine being in the sense that we are divinized by absorption into the Godhead such that Creator and the created are indistinguishable.** It is a spiritual union that is the work of the Holy Spirit— "we were all baptized by [or "in"] one Spirit so as to form one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).²⁶³ In this "Spirit-baptism"²⁶⁴ the Holy Spirit bridges the chasm of space and time. He takes what happened then—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—and brings its saving power into our lives now, by uniting us in a spiritual way with Christ.⁶

c. What does Jesus tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit? (cf. Jn. 16:5-15)

- i. **Convict:** (v.8) – The world of their (our) sin, Christ's righteousness, and the coming judgment.
 1. A general description of the Counsellor's role *vis-à-vis* the world is given in 16:8: *When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.* The word the NIV translates as 'convict of guilt'

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 84–85.

⁵ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 185-186). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

⁶ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 182-183). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

(*elenchō*), was used by Greek moralists in relation to the conscience, and in the LXX with forensic overtones, as it has here. When the Counsellor proves the world wrong 'in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment' it could lead either to repentance and salvation or hardening of heart and condemnation, depending upon the response of those proved wrong. The Spirit's conviction would be effected through the ministry of the disciples (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24–25).

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ii. **Guide:** (v. 13) – Believers into truth.

1. What they could not bear then, they would need to understand afterwards. Therefore, Jesus promised, *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. The Spirit is here referred to with the masculine pronoun 'he' (ekeinos), underlining again (cf. 15:26) the personhood of the Spirit—he is not just a force.*⁸
2. His role is to testify to Jesus: *He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.* As Jesus did not speak independently of the Father, so the Counsellor will not speak independently of Jesus. What he hears from the Son he will tell the disciples: the significance of the things 'yet to come', i.e. the significance of the events soon to befall Jesus, and perhaps his return at the end of the age.⁹

iii. **Declare:** (vv. 13, 14, 15) – I.e., He will make it known to you...

1. This is repeated by John and that is something that we should not miss.
 - a. The Holy Spirit does not act on his own accord. He operates as a member of the Trinity. And as such he has the same heart, will, and intention as the Father and Son. In fact, it is not that the Father, Son, and Spirit all happen to agree on heart, will, and intention, it is that they inseparably have the same heart, will, and intention.
 - b. This means that the holy Spirit will never ask you to do something that violates the Word of God or the will of God that is made clear in the Scriptures. Nor, will the Holy Spirit Ask you to do something that would not bring glory to Jesus.
2. Underlining that the Counsellor does not act independently, Jesus said, *He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.* Just as Jesus' purpose was to bring glory to the Father, so the Counsellor's role is to bring glory to Jesus. This he will do by taking what belongs to Jesus and making it known to his disciples. Jesus then explained, *All that belongs to the Father is mine.* In several other places it is made clear that all that belongs to the Father belongs to Jesus (3:35; 13:3; 17:7, 10). However, here the emphasis is upon the knowledge the Father has, for Jesus went on to say, *That is why I said the Spirit*

⁷ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 325.

⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

⁹ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

will take from what is mine and make it known to you. The knowledge the Father has also belongs to Jesus (cf. 15:15), and the Counsellor will take that knowledge and make it known to the disciples. Once again, this is not an absolute statement, meaning everything God knows will be revealed to the disciples. It relates to the significance of the great saving events that were about to unfold in the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰

- iv. **Glorify:** (v. 14) – He works to make sure that Jesus is seen correctly.
 - 1. Just as Jesus’ purpose was to bring glory to the Father, so the Counsellor’s role is to bring glory to Jesus. This he will do by taking what belongs to Jesus and making it known to his disciples.¹¹
 - 2. We glorify God by participating in his righteousness and in right worship.
 - a. If the life of the Father is made available through the Son and imparted through the Spirit, am I living in a way that demonstrates that I am a new creation?
 - b. This is why we ask the question:
 - 3. **Life-defining Question: Is the Spirit flowing through me?**
 - a. **A disciple is...**
 - i. **Character: Dependent upon the Holy Spirit**
 - ii. **Competency: Actively trusting and obeying**

3. Being led by the Spirit

- a. The book of Acts is a helpful companion in this passage in 1 Corinthians.
 - i. Remember, we get a glimpse of what Paul encountered in Corinth when he first arrived.
- b. The leading of the Holy Spirit is an undercurrent assumption by Luke for much of Acts.
 - i. Then there are passages like this that make it clear that Paul and company weren’t simply going “wherever” but were following the guidance of the Spirit.
 - ii. **The direction of the Spirit is common in Acts (4:31; 8:29, 39; 10:44; 13:2, 4). Here, as in the case of Peter with Cornelius and of Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch, the Spirit leads the outreach (Schneider 1982: 204). There are OT precedents for such a call as well (Isa. 6:8; Jer. 1:5–10).**¹²
 - iii. This following the Spirit could not have been easy:
 - 1. **This must have been something of a testing time for all of them, with Paul and Silas establishing a partnership, and Timothy, as the younger colleague, getting to know them but wondering what on earth he had let himself in for.** It’s one thing to trust God’s guidance when it’s actually quite obvious what to do next. **It’s something else entirely when you seem to be going on and on up a blind alley.**¹³
- iv. The only right response to the Spirit: Obedience

¹⁰ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

¹¹ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

¹² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 526.

¹³ Tom Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13–28* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 58–59.

1. **The multiple instances of direction by God underscore divine involvement in the journey's itinerary.**¹⁴
 2. In this situation, God made it evident to Paul that another ministerial itinerary was desired. **To this there was only one response: obedience.**¹⁵
- c. Are we making space to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?**
- i. One of the most frequent questions about the Spirit is, how do I know when he is speaking to me?
 1. This is a good question. But, often we first need to examine if we are making space for the Holy Spirit in our lives?
 - ii. The reality is that we make time and space for what we believe to be most valuable.
 1. Which one is it? ... "I don't have time." or "I didn't make time."
 - a. We make time for what we want to.
 - b. Our calendars do not lie to us. → They show exactly what we find most valuable.
 - c. Your screen time app on your device is not lying to you... you really did spend 3 hours on Facebook today.
 2. Making space is not complicated... we do it in every other area of our lives.
 - a. Start with small and repeatable steps or appointments.
 - b. Personally, I am not above using technology to help spur me on spiritually. I will literally schedule time in my day for prayer.
 - c. As we grow we will find that prayer and listening for the Lord becomes interwoven through our day.
- d. How do we hear the voice of the Spirit?**
- i. **The Bible:** We believe that God inspired the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit to human authors.
 1. I.e., We believe that you can hear God's voice when you read the Bible.
 2. This is the first and most important step in learning to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The Spirit will never contradict something that is in the Bible.
 - ii. **Other mature believers:** We are called to spur one another on and to help disciple each other.
 1. One way to test if you are hearing from the Lord is to run it by other mature believers. Or, to test it against previously heard wise counsel or input from mature believers.
 - a. God is not going to reveal "truth" to one person and then offer a different "truth" to another person.
- e. God moves servants who are moving.**
- i. What are we called to? → The Great Commission.
 - ii. Paul and company were on the move and active in Great Commission ministry, they were actively looking for God to intervene in their day.
 1. Do we live with a posture of expectancy?
 2. Do we live looking for God to intervene in our day?
 - a. Who is he bringing across my path?
 - b. What does he want me to do?
 - c. Where does he want me to be?

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 528.

¹⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 528.