Demonstration of the Spirit’s Power

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Key Verse: 2:4 “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.”

In the previous chapter Paul proclaimed that the message of the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Believing the message of the cross is not a foolish thing, but a blessing to experience the power of God for our salvation. Paul also said that the message of the cross is understood only by those who have the wisdom of God. In chapter two Paul continues how this wisdom of God is revealed and explained, and how he preached the message of the cross in the Corinth Church while he was there. He emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in this chapter.

First, a demonstration of the Spirit’s power (1-5) When we read Acts 18:1-17, we know how Paul started his ministry in Corinth Church. After returning from Athens, Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, the tentmakers, in Corinth. Paul preached the gospel to the Jews in the synagogue. But when they opposed and persecuted him, Paul turned to the Greeks. He stayed there for one and half years and preached the message of the cross whole-heartedly. Now look at verse 1. “***And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”*** From a human point of view, Paul was a great scholar and an expert of Moses’ law. He was a Pharisee who had studied under the prominent rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem. He also understood Greek philosophy and mastered Eastern religion. So, Paul had many reasons to boast about his human knowledge. But he put aside all these things when he came to Corinth. He said in verse 2. “***For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.***” Paul said that he resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ. He said the same in his letter to the believers in Philippi Church. “*But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.*..” (Php 3:7,8) In Paul’s day people in the city of Corinth and Athens sought human wisdom and knowledge. When Paul visited there, they spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. (Ac 17:21) Even today people want to hear sermons which provide worldly knowledge and information for a better life. So, some mega-churches in Korea hire highly educated pastors with many degrees as a major qualification for their pastor. But Paul said that he resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ Crucified. He had confidence and strong faith in the power of the message of the cross. Amen!

Verses 3-4 teach us how Paul preached the message of the cross in Corinth Church. Look at verse 3. “***I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling***.” What does it mean when Paul came in weakness with great fear and trembling? This does not necessarily mean that Paul was physically or mentally weak, but it meant that he depended on the power of the Holy Spirit. He came to them with humility seeking Christ’s power. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 he said, “*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me*.” Paul was a learned man, but he did not depend on his knowledge, but on the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt Paul prayed. He humbly asked for God’s help before he preached. He realized that he couldn’t do anything without the Holy Spirit. Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, not of human effort. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit convicts our conscience that we admit that we are wrong in our sin. (Jn 16:8). The Holy Spirit enables us to be born again. (Jn 3:5) The Holy Spirit transforms sinners, making us a new creation in Christ. (2 Co 5:17, Tit 3:5) Look at verses 4-5. “***My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power***.” These verses are Paul’s testimony about how he preached the gospel there.

In Paul’s day the intelligent studied oratory and rhetoric to persuade others. They were honored with their wise and persuasive words. But Paul did not depend on this rhetoric skill, but on the power of the Holy Spirit. As missionaries and Bible teachers, we are tempted to provide a lot of Bible knowledge and information to help others to believe. Of course, reading many books and sharing worldly information are not bad at all. My point is that we must depend on the work of the Holy Spirit when we teach the Bible. During outreach on campus some may be afraid of poor language or lack of conversation skills. But when you have confidence in the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, God works. Preaching is not a matter of skill, but a matter of power.

In the book of Acts Philip did not take much time to help Candace, the Ethiopian eunuch, to believe in Jesus. When he helped Candace to understand Isaiah 53, the Holy Spirit opened his spiritual eyes to see Jesus. (Ac 8:26-40) In the age of the early church in Korea there was an evangelist named ‘Power Choi” His message was simple and clear. “Jesus for heaven! Unbelief for hell! He traveled around the whole country shouting this message. One day a farmer who was plowing his field heard this message and wondered about its meaning. Mr. Choi stopped and explained to him its meaning, and immediately the farmer repented and believed in Jesus.

On the first day of the new year 1985 I went up to the top of a high mountain with several books of philosophy to assure my salvation. I wanted to know who God is, what truth is, and who I am, through my meditation and effort. For three days I fasted and prayed. But nothing happened. So, I came down from the mountain hungry and despaired. That summer I joined the UBF Summer Bible Conference with the same expectation. I wanted to experience the Holy Spirit. Even though I heard many heart-moving messages and testimonies, I was not changed. Nothing seemed to happen to me. So, I decided to leave in the middle of the conference. But the last day when I sang hymns, the Holy Spirit came upon me. I converted that day and I have dedicated my life to Christ since then. We do not know how and when the Holy Spirit works for our salvation. The Holy Spirit works when you pray. The Holy Spirit works when you read the Bible. You will receive power when you sing hymns like me. Some received the Holy Spirit when they were driving. The Holy Spirit comes strong when we repent. Above all, the Holy Spirit works when you talk about Jesus Crucified, and when you teach the message of the cross. As Jesus said, the Holy Spirit works like the wind which no one knows where it comes from and where it goes. God works according to his plan and in his way through the Holy Spirit.

Second, be a person with the Spirit (be a spiritual man)! (6-16) Look at verses 6-10a. “***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. No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” --the things of God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things of God has revealed to us by his Spirit...***” Here, God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden, and the things of God revealed by his Spirit are the same words, which is the message of the cross. Paul said that he preached the message of the cross to those who understood it by the work of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said before, this world through its wisdom does not know Jesus and understand the message of the cross. (1:21) If they had understood it, they would not crucify Jesus the Son of God and their Messiah. (8) In verse 10 Paul clearly said that the hidden message of the cross is understood and revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Paul explains more in the following verses. “***The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.***” (10b,11) These verses mean that we understand spiritual things only by the Holy Spirit. Once Jesus predicted his death and resurrection to his disciples. Peter put aside Jesus and rebuked him, not understanding what Jesus meant. Jesus rebuked Peter saying, “*Get behind me, Satan…you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men*.” (Mt 16:23) Peter did not understand what the things of God meant. Later he understood the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection when the Holy Spirit came upon him. (Ac 2:14-41)

To understand the things of God, we must be men with the Spirit, which means that we must be spiritual men and women. Look at verse 12-13. “***What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with the Spirit-taught words***.” When we receive the Holy Spirit, our spiritual eyes and ears are opened to see and hear the spiritual world. We understand spiritual realities because the Holy Spirit teaches us what’s going on. There are many kinds of people in this world, but there are only two kinds in the spiritual world. One is a natural man, a man without the Spirit, and the other is a spiritual man, a man with the Spirit. Jesus confirmed this while he talked with Nicodemus. “*Flesh gives birth to flesh, and the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again*.’ (Jn 3:6,7) Nicodemus was a physical man without the Spirit. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. But he did not understand what Jesus said, “*You must be born again.*” (Jn 3:5) He did not understand the spiritual things because he was spiritually blind. What Jesus said was understood only when he was born again by the Holy Spirit, and when he became a spiritual man.

The Bible was written with the Spirit-taught words. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, “*All Scripture is God-breathed...”* which means the whole Bible was written by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, people do not understand the real meaning and message behind the Scriptures with their wisdom. Only can they understand them with the help of the Holy Spirit because the Bible was written by the Spirit-taught words. This is the reason why we must pray before we read the Bible or preach the sermon. We must pray that the Holy Spirit may open our spiritual eyes to understand and find the hidden secret and the mystery of God.

In verses 14-16 Paul again said that the natural (physical) person does not understand spiritual things, and that the spiritual person makes right judgment with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, it is foolish for church people to bring spiritual issues to the worldly court for judgment. How can we expect people without the Spirit to make the right judgment about the things of God? These are rightly judged by those who have the mind of Christ, which means by those who understand the spiritual world. (16)

In conclusion we, University Bible Fellowship Church, believe the work of the Holy Spirit through Bible study. In fact, wherever the message of the cross is preached, the Holy Spirit works. So, we must diligently teach the message of the cross and pray for the work of the Holy Spirit. Do you want to be a spiritual man or a natural man? I pray that we all may grow as spiritual men, mature Christians, who live by the Spirit and work with the Spirit. Amen!