

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans
February 9, 2020
“God’s Wisdom requires Spiritual Discernment” 5th Sunday after Epiphany
1 Corinthians 2: 1 - 16
Pastor Jonathan

How do you get perspective on your life? When it comes to visual perception, sometimes you have to back away from an object or person to see them rightly. If the object or person is too close, you can’t make out who or what it is, because it is simply a fuzzy glob in front of your eyes. Put this paper on your face and tell me what you see. Not much, right? Now the opposite is true too, right? For example, please read what I am showing you right now. I don’t think you can. It’s too far away, because the farther away it gets in your perception, the smaller it gets.

So let’s apply perception to spiritual life. If your problems, sins and rebellion are right up in your face, you will know there is something wrong, but you won’t be able to see what it is, because you’re too close to it. It is blocking your vision, but all you see is the blurriness, not the object or problem that is too close to you. And the opposite is true. If God is too far away, or His Word is something you want to read, but don’t read, then how will you be able to perceive what He is saying to you. So part of the solution is getting a little farther away from your problems, sins, challenges and obstacles; while getting closer to God and His Word.

This is part of what Paul is trying to address in 1 Corinthians 2. How do we get perspective on what God is saying in these days? First, Paul says that it is not about wonderful diction, execution, and stories in speaking. It’s not about how humorous or entertaining the speaker is, or how eloquent. You can listen to all kinds of Christian preachers on radio, TV and the internet. Their delivery and style does not make them correct in their teaching or preaching. You know this. There are many that are good and helpful, don’t hear me wrongly. But just because they are on the radio or TV or internet doesn’t make them God’s messenger.

Whenever I or any other preacher or teacher stands up in front of you or anyone else, such as I did last week at Westminster church for Chris Clarke’s induction, I come with who I am. I am weak and tired many times. I can be fearful and anxious standing here. Have you spoken in front of a group? Do you know what it feels like? Yes? We tremble before God, because He listens, and we must, I must give an account to Him.

So even if I do have a great delivery, or one particular teaching or preaching is exceptionally humorous or well-timed, that doesn't mean that it will always be that way. What Paul encourages us to listen to is the Holy Spirit, and the demonstration of the Holy Spirit deeds and power. This is so you will depend on God for what is from God and not just on me or human/worldly wisdom, but God's.

So as one critical application of this principle, when it comes to marriage, what defines marriage, where do we look? How do we get perspective? We can look many place and hear many voices. But we look to Scripture because God speaks there. And there consistently we find "A man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh..." Matthew 19:5, also you can read it in Genesis 2:24, because Jesus is quoting that Scripture as authoritative on this subject, and in response to a question about marriage. Also you can read it in Mark 10:7-8 and in Paul, Ephesians 5:31 where he not only references marriage on behalf of couples, but also teaches that Jesus Christ is the husband and the Church is his bride. He talks about a profound mystery in marriage being about oneness, and that same principle applies to the Jesus and the Church. In 1 Corinthians 6:16 Paul also teaches on this unity, which is rightly only available to a man and a woman, even though people regularly reject God's teaching and go another way. Why they go there and how we welcome everyone who is broken is another discussion.

Right now the teaching is on what marriage is. Scripture has only one understanding of marriage, which is also reflected in our historic creeds and statements, including *Living Faith*. Some have suggested that we have changed our minds historically as a Church on slavery and women in leadership in the church. But the Bible does not support slavery, it did not in its time attack the institution, but was foundational to those who would speak out against one human being owning another. Similarly, the Bible does not condemn women in leadership, while there is one passage in 1 Timothy 2, that suggests order in the worship service because there was disorder, likely caused by women in that case, nevertheless, Paul often greets women leaders in his letters (Acts 18: 24-26; Romans 16:6, 12). Was this something that Paul intended for women to never take up any leadership role in the church, except with children and other women? Some have interpreted the Bible this way. Many have not. The argument that people have defeated slavery and the putting down of women necessarily leads to

equality rights in the church for LGBT+ in terms of leadership and marriage does not hold water.

But when it comes to stewarding your sexuality as a believer, the Bible is very clear that we are not to be sexually active outside of marriage. It is clear that if your desires are other than that, either heterosexually or homosexually, or any other type of sexuality, that you are to exercise self-control and get help from like minded friends. But can we even help one another in this way?

The government may soon call this kind of teaching a hate teaching, and that I or you could be arrested for helping someone go against their sexual orientation, even at their request. The Senate bill 202 will make it illegal to speak against trying to convert others to any sexuality other than their stated sexuality, not just the terrible shock and aversion therapies of long ago. We may not even be able to pray with someone legally.

Ironically both sexuality and marriage are divisive topics. Legally. They were meant to bring people together. Now they are dividing persons. In our case, we may have to choose to follow Scripture and risk arrest or imprisonment. How we choose to make these decisions is difficult, but God gives guidance. As Peter and John replied to the government of their time: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you (the government) rather than God." (Acts 4:19)

Then all of a sudden what Paul is teaching on in 1 Corinthians 2 is critical. God's wisdom doesn't make sense to those who are accepting the wisdom of this age and the rulers of this age. I have been called a hater, but that's not my heart. Everyone is welcome here. We are all broken and sinful. We all need help. The wisdom of Jesus is that he hung out with sinners, but didn't go along with our sin, but rather taught us a new way, to go away from sin.

Jesus' way was not received. We know Jesus was crucified. Jesus' way leads us to life and life beyond this life. He can lead us through all the confusion of various sexual sins, heterosexual, homosexual and other ones. But the Spirit is the only One who can make that clear.

Paul teaches on the Holy Spirit for a moment. He says the Spirit of God, like a person's spirit knows the mind of the person, so the Spirit knows everything in God the Father's mind. We don't accept worldly wisdom (v.

12) but seek to apply the Holy Spirit's help to every part of our lives, not just the sexual parts. The Spirit teaches us to wisely apply the Scriptures to today. We need spiritual understanding and wisdom. That means we need the person of the Holy Spirit to guide us through all the mine fields of broken and wrongful thinking that all sides of the issue can sometimes fall into. We need to care for one another where we disagree, to be kind to one another and hold onto the truth patiently. We need to be spiritual people: that means in Paul's language, people who are close to the Holy Spirit and listen to what He says. The Holy Spirit's voice clearly represents the mind of Christ. So as we follow the Holy Spirit in all matters in life, we follow Jesus.

The Presbytery of Ottawa will vote on allowing same sex marriage and LGBT+ in leadership in the PCC, whether married or not, on Feb. 18 (only nine days away). Thank you for praying for us.

No matter how that vote goes, or how the overall vote goes in the church, we will continue to hold to Scriptural marriage and sexual ethics here at Grace church. Holding such a position does not mean being unkind and unwelcoming. It means seeking to follow Jesus no matter what our brokenness or tendencies are, and all of us coming together at the foot of the cross.

Let us pray.