

# God's Greatest Secret – 1 Corinthians 2:6-13

Pastor Colin Rieke – February 12, 2017

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—<sup>10</sup> these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

"What is truth?" This was a famous question that Pontius Pilate asked of Jesus shortly before he crucified him. What is good? What is evil? What is right? What is wrong? Even though Pilate asked that question close to 2,000 years ago, it's a question that still is asked today. What is truth? What is true? Truth is an idea that just about everybody supports, but finding the truth proves to be much more difficult. This can happen in the relatively trivial world of sports – Did Tom Brady play a role in deflating footballs two years ago? If he did, then he was rightly punished, if he didn't, he was wrongfully punished. We see this happening in the highly charged, emotional world of politics as well. Perhaps you've heard the term "fake news" thrown around, or "alternative facts," concepts used by both political parties to monopolize their claim on "the truth."

But what often ends up happening, whether it's with sports, religion, or politics, is that we decide in our mind what is true, and then surround ourselves with people who think the same way, who see the same truth. If you're a Patriot's fan, you're convinced the truth is that Tom Brady didn't play a role in deflating footballs. If you're not a Patriot's fan, you're convinced the truth is that Tom Brady did play a role in deflating footballs. If you generally lean Republican, you will believe that all the main-stream media put out is "fake news," and if you generally lean Democrat, you will believe that all Donald Trump does is use alternate facts to support his story.

Thus, the very idea of truth, becomes subjective, it becomes jumbled, and it becomes whatever you want it to be. If it feels good, do it. But is this really truth? Perhaps you've been guilty of thinking this way, perhaps you've been guilty of acting this way, and instead of truly looking for truth, you look for something that makes you feel good, something that supports your point of view. What's true for me, might not be true for you. What's true for me now, might not be true for me later, because my thoughts

change, my ideas change. But is this really truth? It's bad enough when we apply this standard of truth to our way of life here, but it's even worse when we try to apply this same standard to the God we worship.

(1)

It is this same question about truth that plagued the Corinthian Christians as well, in fact, it has been an area of struggle for every generation of the human race since the fall into sin by Adam and Eve several thousand years ago. What is true about our God? What does our God want? What does our God expect? What will our God reward?

The Roman and Greek pantheon of gods from Paul's day provided ample evidence of the kinds of things that people dreamed up about the gods they worshiped. Each god controlled an aspect of nature or human emotion or activity, and as long as you prayed to that god or brought it offerings, that god would watch over your life and your livelihood. The goal as it is with all religion is to one day be good enough to get to heaven. This is what passed for truth in Corinth.

This idea of truth not only spills over into our day and age today, but it spills over from worshiping a god or gods who created the universe we live in to worshiping mankind. The wisdom of mankind is elevated to a god-like pedestal. The tolerance of mankind is elevated to a god-like pedestal. The love of man-kind is elevated to a god-like pedestal. And now any god, Christian or otherwise, must compete with our idea of what is wise, must compete with our idea of what is tolerant, must compete with our idea of what is loving. And if said god cannot measure up to our idea of what a god should be, he (or she) is not worth worshiping.

There's only one problem with this, and Paul points it out in our Scripture reading this morning. **"No one knows the thoughts of God."** This is the same concept that Isaiah brings out in the Old Testament. **"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways."** God is telling us in the Bible that we as puny human beings are not capable, we do not have the capacity nor the intellect to discern the thoughts of God. We are not capable of understanding God's thoughts. And so it should come as no surprise then that there will be some things we will not understand – about this world and what happens in it, and about our God.

In fact, we wouldn't know anything about our God if he did not reveal himself to us. We can look out at nature and marvel at the creative power of a supreme being, but we cannot know him. And so God revealed himself. He revealed himself to Adam and Eve, he revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he revealed himself to Kings David and Solomon. He revealed himself to prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, and to men like Paul. And despite the millennia those men were separated by, God revealed himself in a way unlike any god that we could make up.

In one way he was similar to our idea of God. God requires a certain standard for us to please him. But unlike the gods we create in our heads, God's standard is perfection, it is holiness. God says **"Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy,"** and **"Be perfect!"** But despite this clear directive from God of how to live, we still seek to impose our will upon his. "Well God really doesn't mean we have to be perfect-perfect, just 'good enough'-perfect." Because God would never ask us to do something we weren't

capable of doing. But here's the rub to our sinful nature. God does expect us to be perfect. God doesn't expect us to adjust what he says to suit our own inclinations. God's expectation and law is immutable.

In addition to God's law, he reveals to us something else about himself. He reveals his love. His love was revealed in his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. This is **"the mystery that has been hidden"** which Paul talks about. It is called a mystery, because it is something that we couldn't have thought up in a million years. Any other religion out there never has a god giving up something for mankind. It's always based on what mankind gives up for god. God's mystery is that he gave something up for you. Jesus' mission was simple, he summarized it like this: **"I did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law."** And fulfill it he did, for you and for me.

But this truth seems so simple, this truth seems unfair. And so, even though I have been given the truth by God, I add to it. I add to it by imposing my truth upon God, instead of imposing God's truth upon me. I will say or think such things like "Yea, Jesus died for your sins, but to be a real Christian, you need to come to church, you need to help those less fortunate, you need to support the modern day nation of Israel." Or I impose my thoughts upon God in the other way, "Well if Jesus died for my sins, then it doesn't matter what I do, it doesn't matter if I come to church, it doesn't matter what church I belong to." Brothers and sisters, these are my thoughts imposed upon God, instead of his thoughts imposed upon me.

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Recognize what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to free us from sin, he did not come to free us to sin. This is GOD'S GREATEST SECRET. God's Word clearly states how he wants us to be, he wants us to be perfect, he wants us to be holy, something that we are utterly incapable of doing. Instead of judging on a curve, he sent his Son. So Jesus came to do what we could not, he took my sin, and gave me his perfection. This is GOD'S GREATEST SECRET.

It's a secret because it's something that the world could never come up with. This is what Paul says at the beginning of our reading from 1 Corinthians. **"None of the rulers of this age understood it,"** that is, God's secret. But it's not just something that rulers of this world cannot comprehend, but this mystery remains unknown to the whole world. So it shouldn't surprise you to hear someone who's not a Christian talk in a way that doesn't understand this mystery.

Because this mystery, this secret of God, lies hidden in the gospel. For **"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him."** It's **"a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began."** Ponder the meaning of those words. God planned this all out before time began, before he created Adam and Eve. And not just the mystery that he would send his Son to die for us, but that *he* would cause us to believe this wonderful secret, this wonderful mystery.

It is a mystery that doesn't hit us over the head when we're driving down the road, it's a mystery that doesn't come to us when we're praying, it's a mystery that comes to us by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. For just like none of you know what I'm thinking now, not one of us knows what God is thinking, except his Spirit. It is that Spirit that he brings down to you. It's that Spirit that reveals GOD'S GREATEST SECRET. It is God's Spirit that convinces you everything written in the Bible is true, it

convinces you that Jesus died for your sins. We cannot come to this realization on our own, it's because of the Spirit.

So what is truth? What is wisdom? It's no secret that Christians will have a different answer from the rest of the world. It's no secret that the world looks to science, technology and education for their wisdom and truth, a wisdom and truth that is constantly changing. If you're as frustrated as I am about this kind of a truth, then come and take a look at the gospel. The gospel truth which has not changed since the world began, because the God of truth does not change. It would make no sense for us to try and improve upon this truth. That would be like putting decorative tinsel on a bar of gold. This simple truth is GOD'S GREATEST SECRET, but a secret that we should share with everyone. Amen.