



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
1 Corinthians 2:6-16

September 24, 2017
English Standard Version

“Cross Words: Spirit”

The 4th Sermon in a series on The Book of 1st Corinthians

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

*“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” — ¹⁰ these things God has **revealed** to us through the Spirit.*

*For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except **the Spirit of God**. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of **the Spirit of God**, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”*

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. We need to be reminded of what makes the greatness of the Gospel, the Power of the Cross, and the Glory of Christ! We need to know the wisdom of Your Word for all the problems of our lives. Speak to us by the power of Your Spirit that we might be people who listen to You, responding in faith and obedience. Thank You

that 1st Corinthians is a love letter to unlovely people, pointing them, and us, to our Redeemer. We need the redemption He offers. Bring us to the Cross, Bring us the grace of repentance, Soften our hard hearts, Have mercy upon us. And so we pray, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us see Jesus, in His name we pray, amen.

INTRODUCTION: “Spiritual, But Not Religious”¹

Many people today claim to be spiritual. They may not be religious. They may not go to church. They may not even be Christians. **But they claim to be spiritual.** In fact, according to a *USA Today* survey, the majority of atheists consider themselves “*spiritual.*” By now, most of us who talk about religion are used to hearing people say that they’re “*Spiritual, But Not Religious.*” With that phrase generally comes the presumption that religion has to do with doctrine, dogma, and rituals, whereas **spirituality** has to do with the heart, feeling, and experience. The spiritual person has an experience of the divine or of some higher power. They don’t subscribe to beliefs handed down by existing religious traditions, nor do they engage in the ritual life of any particular institution.

One writer said, “having hung out with church folk for several decades, I have come to expect the words “*Spiritual, But Not Religious*” to be accompanied by air quotes and a tone of disdain. But lately even non-religious folk have begun to hate on **the SBNR** (their hip new acronym). Some atheists have scorned them for not having the courage to come out and admit that they’re really just atheists trying not to be offensive. Susan Jacoby writes in The New York Times, “*Spiritual, But Not Religious*”... translated from the psychobabble, can mean just about anything — that the speaker is an atheist who fears social disapproval or a fence-sitter who wants the theoretical benefits of faith, including hope of eternal life, without the obligations of actually practicing a religion.”

Lillian Daniel’s book, **When “Spiritual But Not Religious” Is Not Enough**, will not disappoint those who have come to enjoy her snarky jabs at those fence-sitters who want it all: **the SBNR**. Now, Lillian is what some would call a “progressive evangelical” which is a nice way of saying, “I still believe, but I’m theologically liberal.” So, we probably wouldn’t agree on a lot of theological or biblical issues. However, she’s hysterical (kind of like a liberal, female version of Shane Morris – “Shane, I hope you’re **listening** down there in Florida”).

One example of her snarky sense of humor – she writes, “On airplanes, I dread the conversation with the person who finds out I am a minister and wants to use the flight time to explain to me that he is “*Spiritual, But Not Religious.*” Such a person will always share this as if it is some kind of daring insight, unique to him, bold in its rebellion against the religious status quo. Before you know it, “he’s telling me that he finds God in the sunset ... and in walks on the beach.”

1 Introduction is adapted from the articles, “Does Being ‘Spiritual But Not Religious’ Really Mean Anything?” by Adam Frank, All Things Considered, 10/21/14, www.npr.org; “Spiritual-Not-Religious or Just Lazy?” by Kate Blanchard, 2/25/13, www.religiondispatches.org; “Spiritual but Not Religious” by Amy Hollywood, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Winter/Spring 2010, www.bulletin.hds.harvard.edu; “How to Practice Gospel-Centered Spirituality” by Dr. Don Whitney, *The Gospel Coalition Blog*, 4/24/15, www.thegospelcoalition.org; and the sermon “Are You Spiritual?” by Rev. Josh Black, First Evangelical Free Church, Wichita, KS, 9/6/15, www.firstfreewichita.org; and the book When “Spiritual But Not Religious” Is Not Enough by Lillian Daniel, pages 127-128.

She ridicules people she says try to make up their own God and their own forms of worship, [which is] often some shallow combination of exercise and caffeine, coffee shops as spiritual community, hikes as pilgrimages, and sunsets — don't ever forget the sunsets. These people are always informing you that they find God in the sunsets. **Well, excuse me**, as if people who go to church don't see God in a sunset. You know, my take is that any idiot can find God in the sunset.

Thank you for sharing, “*Spiritual, But Not Religious*” sunset person. You are now comfortably in the middle of self-centered American culture, in the bland majority of people who find ancient religions dull but find themselves uniquely fascinating. Can I switch seats now and sit next to someone who has been shaped by a mighty cloud of witnesses instead? Can I spend my time talking to someone brave enough to encounter God in a real human community? Because when this flight gets choppy, that's who I want by my side, holding my hand, saying a prayer, and simply putting up with me ... **just like we do in church.**

What is remarkable ... is finding God in the context of [broken people and a flawed community], and a tradition bigger than you are with people who may not reflect God back to you in your own image. Part of the nature of religion, so much beat up on in our society, is that it delivers a message that is like sandpaper against the culture of narcissism. It is **not** all about you and, no, you **cannot** make it up. The beauty of a long tradition is that it is bigger than anything we can do by ourselves.” **Amen! I could read that every week!**

So, how **do** we respond to the “*Spiritual, But Not Religious*” crowd in a **less** snarky, **more** gracious, and **much more** Biblical way? Does what these **SBNR people** claim bear any resemblance to what we might call **Biblical Spirituality**? Don Whitney, the author of a great book called Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, says “Perhaps for many, spirituality simply means spending time occasionally in personal reflection. For others, maybe it means consciously trying to live by certain principles, or attempting to be thoughtful on important issues like the environment or homelessness.” But this is not **Biblical Spirituality**.

According to Whitney, **Biblical Spirituality** transcends the human spirit. It “involves the pursuit of God **and the things of God**, through Jesus Christ, by the power of **the Holy Spirit** in accordance with God's [Word].” And that's what our text today teaches us about **Biblical Spirituality**. Turn in your Bibles to **1 Corinthians**. **Last week** we saw Paul defend *the word of the cross* as *the wisdom of God* and *the power of God*. The world's wisdom values power, glory, and success. The gospel puts forward *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. The promised One has been punished. The King has been killed. This is foolishness and weakness to the world. But it's *the wisdom and power of God*. The world's wisdom is powerless against sin and death. But we can be saved from sin and death by **the cross of Christ**. That's why it's *the wisdom and the power of God*.

We learned that we're saved by grace alone, not by our own efforts and not by the eloquence of any preacher. If I remember correctly, last week the phrase was “*we're not all that impressive.*” Therefore, we've no reason to boast, **except in the Lord**. If we're saved by **grace alone**, the glory belongs to **God alone**.

This week Paul continues the argument. He gives reasons why some people find the gospel foolish and reject it, while others receive it and are saved. And he gives us reasons why we have no cause to boast in our salvation. Instead, **1st Corinthians** points these relatively new Christians back to **fundamental truths** about God and the **Gospel** of His Son Jesus. No matter

how complex or **how difficult** the problem, Paul's answer is basic. It's **knowing** God **revealed** in Jesus Christ, **crucified** on the Cross, **risen** from the dead, by the enabling **power** of the Holy Spirit. That's it – understanding and learning how to apply **the Gospel of God's Grace** for sinners in all the details of our lives. That's his response to **every problem the Corinthians are dealing with**.

And so **1st Corinthians** is both **exciting** and **intimidating**, because it's dealing with the real issues with which we struggle ... **even now**. What work of grace might the Lord do in our lives ... and in our life as a church ... as we come under the teaching of this book? I want you to **pray** with me that God would take hold of our hearts and our minds and our lives by **His Word** in this Book of **1st Corinthians** and begin that gospel work among us.

So, let's get started. And our text today begins with ...

v. 6-10a: THINGS OF THE SPIRIT REVEALED ²

*“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” —¹⁰ these things God has **revealed** to us through the Spirit.”*

This passage could be summarized in one sentence. It's found in the first part of **verse 6**. **“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom...”** In the previous passage, Paul demolished the false wisdom of the world. And he said that his speech and message weren't in **plausible words of wisdom**, that is, the world's wisdom. In this passage, Paul seeks to put genuine wisdom in its place. The rest of the passage explains the sentence in **verse 6**. This will teach us what it means to have wisdom, what it means to be **spiritual**, and what it means to be discerning.

Let's start with wisdom. What do we learn about the wisdom Paul imparts? The gospel is **revealed** through the Spirit to the apostles. **First** of all, the wisdom that Paul imparts is **the word of the cross**, or the gospel of Christ. **1 Corinthians 1:23-24**, *“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the power of God and the wisdom of God.**”* So the wisdom Paul imparts is the gospel. And this isn't simply an evangelistic message that gets you into the kingdom of God. It's not like **the door** into the Christian house. It's **the foundation** of the house. And **the roof**. And **the walls**. The gospel informs all **Biblical Spirituality**.

When Paul calls the Corinthians to be unified, in chapters 1-4, he does so, on the basis of **the cross of Christ**. When he calls them to purify the church, in chapter 5, he does so on the basis of **the cross of Christ**. When he calls them to suffer, in chapter 6, he does so on the basis of **the cross of Christ**. When he calls them to honor God with their body, he does so on the

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, pages 61-75; The Cross and Christian Ministry by Dr. D.A. Carson, pages 43-66; Basic Christian Leadership by Dr. John R.W. Stott, pages 59-83; and The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians by Dr. Roy Ciampa and Dr. Brian Rosner, pages 119-138. **And the sermons, “The Way the Word Works” by Dr. David Strain, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 3/26/17, www.fpcjackson.org; **“Are You Spiritual?”** by Rev. Josh Black, First Evangelical Free Church, Wichita, KS, 9/6/15, www.firstfreewichita.org.**

basis of **the cross of Christ**. The gospel is **the wisdom of God**. And it applies to the entire Christian life.

Secondly, this wisdom is **revealed** to the apostles. Notice Paul says in **verse 7**, “*But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*” First, the “*we*” in this verse is referring to the apostles. Second, there’s a tension here. The gospel they declare is **secret** and **hidden** but, as **verse 10** says, has been **revealed**. And yet, it was decreed before the ages. The gospel was secret. But it’s now been **revealed**. What does this mean? Well, the gospel was concealed in the Old Testament. But it has been **revealed** to the apostles who wrote the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it was concealed through types and shadows, things like the exodus, the Passover, the sacrificial system, the priests, the Davidic kings, and the covenants. Those things all pointed to the person and work of Christ. But nobody saw all this fully until God **revealed** these truths to the apostles, who then put them down on the pages of the New Testament. The gospel is not a mystery in that we can’t understand it. It’s a mystery in that it was **hidden** or **concealed**, but has now been **revealed**.

Verse 8 says, “*None of the rulers of this age understood this.*” The rulers of this age are those who embrace the wisdom of the world. And they find the gospel foolishness, because the wisdom of the ages is opposed to the gospel, and comes from man’s attempt to get at the meaning of life. But the wisdom which was decreed from before the ages comes from **God**, by **revelation**.

Look at **verse 10**, “*these things God has **revealed** to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.*” It was **the Spirit of God** who **revealed** God’s plan of salvation in Christ to the apostles.

Now, I’m going to diverge a little bit here and devote specific applications to the newly ordained minister among us. Not that it won’t apply to all of you, but it will specifically apply to him. **Frank** – I have your name in bold print – there are three pastoral acts that are so basic, yet so important, that they will determine the shape of **your** ministry as a pastor. These acts are **quiet**. They don’t call attention to themselves and are easily set aside. And for the most part, no one will tell you to do them. They are acts that involve **paying attention** ... and **listening**.

Prayer is an act of **paying attention** to God ... and to be quiet before God; **Knowing Scripture** is an act of **paying attention** to God’s Word ... and to be quiet so you can **listen** to what He’s saying through that Word; And **listening**, or what Eugene Peterson calls “spiritual direction,” is an act of **paying attention** to what God is doing in the person who happens to be before you at any given moment, which usually takes quiet, intentional, focused listening, not only hearing what that person is saying, but what they’re not saying. However, it is always **God** to whom we are **paying attention**. And not coincidentally, these three quiet acts somewhat conform to the three points of our passage today.

If the things of the spirit are **revealed**, how then do we understand that which is **revealed**? In order to understand what is **revealed** by the Holy Spirit, **you’ll** need a healthy dose of wisdom. **You** need to **pray** for wisdom, and in order for the rest of us to understand what is **revealed** by the Holy Spirit, **you’ll** need to **teach us** to **pray** for wisdom. And since this wisdom comes from **the Spirit of God**, we have to ask, What does it mean to **listen** to the Spirit?

It means, first and foremost, that **you** need to be a person of **prayer**. Not to give God the list of what we want Him to do, but to come before Him, **listening** to His Spirit, so we can face life on His terms, with His conditions. Realizing that **prayer** doesn’t normally get us what we

want, but what He wants. Try to remember to **pray** with an open Bible before you, because it's largely through that combination that the "*secret and hidden wisdom of God ... things God has **revealed** to us through the Spirit.*" And in order to **listen** to God's revelation, **you** must restore **prayer** to its context in God's Word. **Prayer** is not something we think up to get God's attention or enlist His favor. **Prayer** is **answering** God, because the first word is always God's word. Which brings us to our next point, which is about God's Word, or the ...

v. 10b-13: THINGS OF THE SPIRIT TAUGHT

*"For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except **the Spirit of God**. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but **taught** by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual."*

Some **believe** the Bible is **the Word of God** which lays out **the wisdom of God** — that is, God's plan of salvation in Christ. Others **reject** the Bible as **the Word of God** and reject that plan of salvation. Those who are **perishing don't accept** the gospel as **the Word of God**. Those who are being **saved do accept** the gospel as **the Word of God**. Why? Because the gospel is **revealed** through the Spirit to the apostles. And, as we learn in other passages, it was **the Spirit of God** who inspired the apostles to write it all down. We see that in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, "*All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*" And then in **2 Peter 1:21** we read, "*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, **but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***" **The Word of God** is necessary to see God's plan of salvation because **the Word of God** comes from **the Spirit of God**. And only **the Spirit of God** knows **the thoughts of God**, as **verse 11** makes clear. We can only come to know God through the Word and the Spirit.

But **the Word of God** not only **teaches** us the way to **be saved**. It also **teaches** those who **are saved** the way to live holy lives before God. We don't have to come up with a plan for **Biblical Spirituality** on our own. It's been **revealed** through the Spirit to the apostles and is found on the pages of our Bibles. So, one application we see here is our need to know and live by **the Word of God, the wisdom of God, the gospel of God**. But next, we have to ask the question. Who are the spiritual? Look at **verse 13**. "*And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but **taught** by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to **those who are spiritual.***" What does this mean? The spiritual truths being spoken of here are the **revealed** things spoken of in **verses 6-12**. The apostles don't use worldly wisdom in their preaching. They declare the gospel. Their words are **taught by the Spirit**. In other words, their words **are the Word of God**.

Therefore, we need to humble ourselves before both the Word and the Spirit. We still have to study the Word, but we also need to pray for understanding. Humble prayer and quiet study are to be combined. The intent of **knowing Scripture** is to **listen** to the God who **reveals** Himself in His Word. **Frank**, that means **you** will you need to **know** the Word. We expect that will result in **you** being able to preach and teach that Word **to us**. And as part of that preaching and teaching, you will **teach us** how to **know** and **listen** to that same Word. What does it mean to **listen** to the Word? Not just hear it or read it, but **listen** to it in such a way that it draws a

response of faith and obedience from within us, changing us, transforming us – so that we look, think, speak, and act a little more like Jesus.

Our text tells us that the apostles **teach** these words to the spiritual. Today, Pastors, Teaching Elders, **You, teach** these words to the spiritual. The *spiritual people* Paul is referring to are the same as the *mature people* he spoke of back in **verse 6**, “*Among the mature we impart wisdom*” and now, **verse 13**, “*We impart spiritual truths to the spiritual.*” These two sentences are essentially saying the same thing. So, who are the **mature**? They’re the **spiritual**. And who are the spiritual? Whoever has **the Spirit of God** is a spiritual person. Paul makes this plain in **verses 14-16**, where he sets the spiritual person against the natural person and tells us about the need for ...

v. 14-16: THINGS OF THE SPIRIT DISCERNED

Let’s compare the natural person with the spiritual person, starting at **verse 14**, “*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*”¹⁵ *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.*¹⁶ “*For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?*” *But we have the mind of Christ.*” The natural person is simply the person without the Spirit. He or she **does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**. Why? Well we’re given two reasons. On the one hand, the natural person **won’t** accept the gospel because it’s folly to him. You **won’t** accept what you find to be foolish. And a crucified Messiah doesn’t fit into the world’s worldview. The world prefers polish and power. It wants to pull itself up by the bootstraps. It wants popularity and prestige. **The cross is offensive**. It says you can’t save yourself. Only God can. And He did that by sending His Son to a cross. This seems like failure and failure seems like foolishness. So the natural person **won’t** accept the gospel.

But it’s also true that you **can’t** accept the gospel unless the Spirit enables you. The gospel is *spiritually discerned*. Therefore, the Spirit must enable people to receive it. However, just because they **can’t** receive the gospel without the Spirit enabling them doesn’t let them off the hook. They still **don’t want** to receive the gospel. So their inability is a **culpable inability** – that means they’re still responsible for their rejection of the gospel. They **don’t want** to know God, except on their own terms, hence, the uniquely **American** claim of being *Spiritual, But Not Religious*. They’re happy to have a god they can more or less manipulate. They don’t want a God to whom they have to admit that they’re sinners who don’t deserve His mercy, and that their hope is in His pardoning and transforming grace.

Now let’s look move from the natural person to the spiritual person, **verse 15**, “*The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.*”¹⁶ “*For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?*” *But we have the mind of Christ.*” This verse is often misunderstood. So we must ask, What does it mean? “**The spiritual person judges all things**. What this means is he not only sees the wisdom of the world, he also has access to **the wisdom of God**, through revelation, and through the Spirit. He knows the mind of the world, **and** he knows the mind of Christ. He judges all things.

Those without the Spirit **don’t** know the mind of Christ. All they have is the wisdom of the world. That’s why Paul says, the spiritual person “*is himself to be judged by no one.*” The natural person doesn’t understand the gospel. So they can’t make judgments on its wisdom or on those who believe. Also, **the mind of Christ** and **the wisdom of God** are found in **the Word of**

God. And all things are judged by **the Word of God.** The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to believe what we find in the Word. What Paul is saying when he says the spiritual person is judged by no one is that the natural person **doesn't** understand the gospel. But the spiritual person **does.** The natural person **doesn't** have access to all of the secret and hidden wisdom of the crucified Lord of glory (**verses 7-8**). They **don't** know what God has prepared for those who love Him (**verse 9**). They **don't** comprehend the thoughts of God (**verse 11**). They **don't** know the mind of Christ (**verse 16**). But the spiritual person **does.**

So why is Paul arguing this point so strongly? And that brings us to the next question. How should spiritual people live? Paul wants the Corinthians to see that it's crazy for them to run after the ways of the world, when they have access to the mind of Christ. But that's exactly what they're doing. They had access to **the wisdom of God**, but they were living according to the wisdom of the world. They were spiritual people, but they were acting like natural people.

Frank, that's where **you** come in. None of the quiet acts laid before you today are public acts, which means that no one knows for sure whether or not we're actually doing them. People **listen** to us pray, they **listen** to us preach and teach the Scriptures, they notice when we're **listening** to them in a conversation, **but they never know** if we're **paying attention to God in any of this.** The acts of **listening** to God, **listening** to God's Word, and **listening** to God's people are what will determine, over the long term, if **you** are a faithful minister.

The people here want that. They'll be the first to tell you, well, most of them, that their own interior lives are a muddle of shopping lists and good intentions, fantasized adultery and actual idolatry, and episodes of heroic virtue, desires for holiness mixed with greed for self-satisfaction. They hope to do better someday ... maybe tomorrow ... next week at the latest.

CONCLUSION: A Ministry of Word and Sacrament³

And because of those muddled interiors, century after century, Christians continue to take certain persons in their communities, set them apart, and say, "We want **you** to be responsible for saying and acting among us what **we believe** about God and the kingdom and the gospel. **We believe** that the Holy Spirit is among us and dwells within us. **We believe** that God's Spirit continues to hover over the chaos of the world's evil and our sin, shaping a new creation and new creatures. **We believe** that God is not merely a spectator, but a participant. **We believe** that everything, especially everything that looks ruined, is material that God is using to make new life. **We believe** all of this, but we don't see it. We see, like Ezekiel, dismembered skeletons bleached under an unrelenting Babylonian sun. We see bones that once were laughing children, loving adults, singing believers – who sinned. We don't see the laughers or the lovers or the singers anymore. What we see are bones. Dry bones. Lots of bones. We see sin and judgment. **That's what it looks like.** It looked that way to Ezekiel; and it looks that way to us.

But **we believe** something else. **We believe** in the coming together of these bones into connected people who speak and sing and laugh and work and believe and praise God. **We believe** that it happened the way Ezekiel said it happened and **we believe** it still happens. **We believe** it happened in Israel and it happens in the church. **We believe** we're part of the process as we sing our praises, **listen** to God's Word, and receive the grace and mercy of Christ in the

³ The applications directed specifically to Rev. Wang and the Conclusion are largely adapted from Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity by Dr. Eugene Peterson, pages 3-33.

sacraments. **We believe** that the most significant thing that happens or can happen is that we are no longer dismembered ... but are remembered into the body of Christ.

We need help in keeping what **we believe** accurate and intact. We don't trust ourselves — our emotions seduce us into unfaithfulness. We know that we're on a difficult and dangerous life of faith, and that there are strong influences intent on diluting or destroying it. **Frank**, we want **you** to help us — be our pastor — *A Minister of Word and Sacrament*, in the middle of this dangerous life.

A Minister of Word and Sacrament comes to us in all the different parts and stages of our lives — in our work and play, with our children and our parents, at birth and death, in our celebrations and sorrows, on those days when morning breaks over us in a wash of sunshine, and those other days that are just drizzle. This isn't the only task in the life of faith, **but it is your task**. We will find someone else to do the other tasks. **This is yours: Word and Sacrament**.

We have **ordained you** to this ministry and we heard **your vows** that **you** will stick to it. This is not a temporary assignment but a way of life that we need **lived out among us**. We know that **you're** on the same difficult life of faith in the same dangerous world that we are. We know that **your** emotions are as unstable as ours, and that **your** mind can play the same tricks on **you** as ours do. That's why we have **ordained you** and why we heard **your vows**. We know that there are going to be days and weeks, maybe even years, when we won't feel like **we're believing** anything and won't want to hear it **from you**. And we know that there will be days and weeks, maybe even years **when you won't feel like saying it**. **That doesn't matter**. Do it. **You** are **ordained** to this ministry, **vowed** to do it. There may be times when we come to **you** as a congregation and demand that **you** tell us something **other** than what we're telling **you** now. Promise us now that **you** won't give in to what we demand. **You're** not the minister of our changing desires, or our felt needs, or our secular hopes for something better.

With these **vows of ordination**, we are lashing **you** fast to the mast of **Word and Sacrament** so that you'll be unable to respond to our siren voices. There are a lot of other things to be done in this sin-sick world in desperate need of **flood buckets** and **hygiene kits**, and we'll do some of them, but if we don't know the basic terms with which we're working, the foundational realities with which we're dealing — The Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Christ — then we're going to end up living futile, fantasy lives. **Your task** is to keep **telling us the story of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God**, the presence of the Spirit, speaking the biblical words of command and comfort, promise and fulfillment, demanding that **we pay attention**. And sometimes **we won't hear you, but we will watch you**. **Listening** to God, **listening** to God's Word, and **listening** to God's people — These are the means by which **you** carry out **your** pastoral ministry, this commitment to God's Word and God's grace in **your** life and in the lives of the people to whom **you** will preach and teach and give the sacraments in the name of Jesus Christ! [And by the way, you're doing the Lord's Supper next Sunday.]

What connects these great realities of God and the great realities of salvation to this church, in this place, in this season? The answer isn't going to change — it's a trained attentiveness to **listening** to God in prayer, to **listening** to God in the Scripture, to **listening** to God's People with *spiritual discernment*. This has not been tried and discarded because it didn't work, but tried and found difficult and shelved in favor of something or other that could better fit into a busy pastor's schedule. These quiet acts are the **means** by which **you** will develop as *A Minister of Word and Sacrament*. These are repetitive acts, often boring, somewhat tedious,

difficult to measure, and hard to number. If you neglect them, you will be forced to turn to fads, gimmicks, programs without end, all under the illusion of being practical. And people will like them and praise you for them, but their lives won't be changed by them. And we desperately need our lives changed.

Remind us that all we have in Christ is by **the Spirit of God**. The gospel is **revealed** by **the Spirit of God**. Apostles and Pastors **preach and teach** it by **the Spirit of God**. And it must be **received** by **the Spirit of God**. And for that to happen ... **You Must Start Listening.**

Think about that, all of you ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. God our Father, we bow before You and we confess to You that we often fail to pay attention to You in prayer, not knowing how to listen to Your Spirit. We confess that we fail to pay attention to Your Word, trading it for the wisdom of the world, often without even thinking about it. Teach us, by Your Spirit, to listen to the Word of God once again, and by it may You do a powerful work in making us a spiritual people who know spiritual truths. And our God and Father, remind us, over and over, that we need to listen to the person in front of us, one of Your People, so that we might minister to them with spiritual discernment.

*And Lord, we pray for Frank Wang this day. Teach him these quiet acts. Use him to teach us these quiet acts. Make him **A Minister of Word and Sacrament** among us. Use us as a church to hold him to these vows, we pray. And when we don't, forgive us. In these weeks and months ahead of us, work these things of the Spirit into our hearts and minds. Through **1st Corinthians**, teach us who we really are in Jesus and strengthen us as we seek to live these words out for your glory and honor and praise. And as we begin to be changed by the Gospel, grant that we may live like people **called** to be saints, **united** in fellowship, **discerning** spiritual truths as spiritual people, all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

This message has been lightly edited and formatted for the web page. No attempt has been made to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template. There may be slight differences with the audio version. Should there be any questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any error to be with the original speaker and should contact him directly. For full copyright, reproduction and permissions information, please visit the PHPC Copyright statement at www.PotomacHills.org.

Romans 16:25-27

#CrossWords

“Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”