Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: The Evidence for a Disciple

Text: **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.**

Opening: I often have the opportunity to talk to people about Christ and listen to them as they share their beliefs with me. One seeming constant that I find in my conversations with unbelievers is a desire to invent spiritual truths based on what they or someone else happens to think about God at that moment. This seems to be a pattern for many rather than seeking to know God as He's revealed Himself to us in creation, the Word and His Son. I often quietly marvel at a person's willingness to stake his or her eternal destiny on certain assumptions about God based on their own human reason. In ***It's a Long Story: My Life*** by **Willie Nelson**, Willie recounts his time as a "***popular***" Sunday School teacher at Metropolitan Baptist Church—a popularity he attributed to his "***openness in exploring spiritual issues"***—an openness by the way that led to him eventually having to step down from the position. For Willie, his dismissal was, in his own words, an "***opportunity to delve deeper in the mystery of the Holy Spirit. More than ever, I sought to learn about the Lord***." One book that had a huge impact on Willie was ***The***

Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, which attempted to fuse Christianity with Hinduism and taught that Jesus discovered and embraced the notion of reincarnation. Willie wrote: ***From the first moment I considered the concept of reincarnation it made sense. The old paradigm was just too cruel, just too unchristian, to be believed: If you die in your sin, you spend eternity in hell. How could the compassionate God of mercy ever set up such a system? On the other hand, I was drawn to the idea that you keep coming back till you get it right. Reincarnation seemed merciful and completely Christ-like. Jesus got it right the first time around and was, after all, God incarnate, perfect man. But the rest of us would need several lifetimes to shed our sins and learn the lessons necessary to heal our troubled souls***. It probably won't surprise you to learn that this kind of blending of spiritual ideas, some Christian and some not, to satisfy human reason has been going on for centuries. The Apostle Paul and his associates spent much of their time sorting out truth from fiction in the early church so that what remained was distinctly Christian and not a distortion of it. **This brings us to the text that I just read. Here's some of the historical background that leads up to our passage for this morning.**

Context: After leaving **Timothy and Silas** behind in **BEREA**, Paul headed for **ATHENS** where he reasoned with the Jews and later some Greek philosophers about their **Unknown God** … unknown to the Greeks but certainly not to Paul. He knew that there was only one God and He had been worshipped by the Jews for centuries and had revealed Himself in His Son only recently. After a few people in **ATHENS** responded to the Gospel, Paul left for **CORINTH**. A little later he was joined again by **Timothy and Silas** and together they attempted to share truth with the Jews in the synagogue. **But when their message was rejected, Paul decided from that moment on, he would take the good news to the Gentiles. God blessed his decision and many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized**. ***Yet they had a lot of baggage that had to be unpacked if they were going to be grounded in the faith***. That's why Paul stayed there for 18 months and eventually wrote four letters (**two of which are 1st and 2nd Corinthians**) to them. He was committed to teaching them what is required of a disciple of Christ.

This morning, in our fifth message in the series, "The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith," and our second message on how to grow as a disciple of Christ, I want to look at a portion of one of those letters … **1 Corinthians 2:6-16 …** that helps us to

identify ***a true follower of Christ***. **In these verses, Paul makes it clear that God has not given us the freedom to recreate Him in our image**. No … ***Christians are called to believe the message contained in the Scriptures that is in many ways counter-intuitive to human reasoning***. Paul makes his case by introducing ***three contrasts*** (**the word contrast means to compare something to show the difference**) ***that distinguish a follower of Christ from an unbeliever so that the difference between them is clear for all to see*.**

First Contrast: ***DISCIPLES OF CHRIST RECEIVE GOD'S WISDOM. UNBELIEVERS DO NOT*** (**1 Corinthians 2:6-9 – 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. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, or ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him**)." **The gospel message focuses on the cross upon which our Messiah died to pay the penalty for our sins. After three days, He rose from the grave for our justification. This is what Christians believe. Unfortunately, the same message that God had revealed to the disciples of Christ and now made so much sense was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles** (See **1 Corinthians 1:24**). ***It was a stumbling block*** because no Jew thought of the Messiah as one who would die -- cursed on a tree. Heaven forbid! The Messiah was to be their deliverer who would reign victoriously over Israel's enemies with uncontested power. ***It was foolishness*** to the Greeks -- who valued reason over faith -- and to the Romans -- who valued might over sacrifice. Gentiles (**both Greeks and Romans**) as a whole wrote off the Gospel message not as some harmless mistake but as a VILE AND IMMENSELY STUPID MESSAGE! So, the cross was dismissed by Jews and Gentiles **with the exception** of those who received and believed the good news. Here Paul refers to them as the "***mature***." He goes on to say that those who continue to rely on the wisdom of the current age and reject the cross are doomed to pass away – to face God's judgment. **Not that they had no other option. This wisdom was hidden only in the sense that though it was there for anyone to discover in the Holy Scriptures many JEWS failed to see the necessity of a Suffering Messiah while countless GENTILES didn't care enough to look**.

There is something else I don't want you to miss in **1 Corinthians 2:6-9**. I'm talking about the phrase "***which God decreed before the ages for our glory.***" This implies that God's original plan was a crucified Messiah. Before the world was created Christ was foreseen as the Lamb who would shed His precious blood on our behalf (**See 1 Peter 19-20**). Of course, none of the rulers of the age understood this or they would not have crucified the Lord. ***So, the great irony is that God's plan before the beginning of time was to use their ignorance to ensure that Jesus would suffer and die to become our Redeemer***.

There is a significant difference between the believer and the unbeliever according to Paul … ***THE BELIEVER SEES THE WISDOM OF GOD IN A CRUCIFIED MESSIAH WHILE THE UNBELIEVER DOES NOT.*** ***The Book of Heroic Failures*** contains a story about the 1978 strike of British firefighters and how the army had to fill the gap for the missing firemen. One afternoon the replacement firefighters got a call to rescue a cat caught high in a tree. The soldiers rushed to the scene, put up a ladder, brought down the cat, and gave it back to the owner. The woman was grateful and invited them in for tea. After a wonderful time, they said goodbye, got in the truck, and backed away—over the cat. That's a little bit of a picture of what the crucifixion of Christ must have looked like to the unbelievers of His day and, sadly, continues to look like to many more in our day. **Christians proclaim that the Messiah has come, but it turns out He tragically died on a cross**. A stumbling block and foolishness except to Christ-followers. (**REVIEW: DISCIPLES OF CHRIST RECEIVE GOD'S WISDOM. UNBELIEVERS DO NOT**.)

Second Contrast: ***DISCIPLES OF CHRIST HAVE THE SPIRIT OF GOD. UNBELIEVERS HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD*** (**1 Corinthians 2:10-13 -- … these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So, no one understands the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual**). ***Paul argues that the only way to receive God's wisdom is by the Holy Spirit***. He illustrates his point by saying that there exists one person other than God who can know what is in a person's heart. That of course is the person himself. In the same way, the only One

who truly grasps the thoughts of God (*concealed in the Old Testament, revealed in the New*) is the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit. ***Now as believers, we have received the Holy Spirit. He enables us to understand the Gospel and respond in the only way that makes sense … with complete faith and trust in Christ***. Unfortunately, this is not the case for those who have the spirit of the world. **Romans 1:18-21** tells us why. Ungodly and unrighteous men have **suppressed the truth by their unrighteousness**. ***As a result, they have become futile in their thinking and darkened in their foolish hearts***. I know this is not a very flattering picture of unbelievers, but it does explain WHY they reject the message of the cross. They simply can't understand it. To them, the message of the cross is sheer foolishness so they continue to rush headlong to the end of life without any sense of spiritual direction.

In his book "**Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life**", the author **Charles Swindoll** tells a story about the **19th Century agnostic Thomas Huxley** *who promoted Darwinism and Humanism in his attacks on Christianity*. Huxley was in Dublin and was rushing to catch a train. He climbed aboard one of Dublin's famous horse-drawn taxis and said to the driver -"***Hurry, I'm almost late ... drive fast***". Off they went at a furious pace and Huxley sat back in his seat and closed his eyes. After a while, Huxley opened his eyes and glanced out the window to notice that **they were going in the wrong direction.** Realizing that he hadn't told the driver where to take him he called out '***Do you know where you're going***?' The driver replied "***No, your honor, but I am driving very fast***'. When it comes to our spiritual lives, the only way to know the right way to go is if the Holy Spirit reveals it to you. We are taught the things of God by the Spirit of God. That's what Paul means when he says, "**Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.** (**REVIEW: DISCIPLES OF CHRIST RECEIVE GOD'S WISDOM. UNBELIEVERS DO NOT. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST HAVE THE SPIRIT OF GOD. UNBELIEVERS HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD**.)

Third Contrast: **DISCIPLES OF CHRIST HAVE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. UNBELIEVERS DO NOT**. To be certain that Paul's readers understand the importance of the revealing work of the Holy Spirit, he provides one final contrast. This point should eliminate any pride or boasting on the part of a believer when it

comes to his acceptance of the message of the cross. He speaks, first, of the natural person.

- **The natural person** (**1 Corinthians 2:14 – 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**). First, let me explain what Paul is not saying. He isn't arguing that unbelievers cannot grasp a discussion of spiritual things. Some Muslims are better versed in what Christians believe than many in the church! **The issue isn't that they lack mental capacity, but that the message itself is regarded as mere foolishness. BUT PAUL DOESN'T STOP THERE**. He then states that the unbeliever is actually incapable of understanding spiritual truths and their spiritual application to our lives because this requires the work of the Holy Spirit. **Without Him, we cannot fathom a powerful Creator taking the place of condemned men and women to save us from the judgment we deserve**. This is why you can share spiritual truth with an unbeliever and explain it clearly, yet that person will be unable to make heads or tails of it.

This week, I was reading about a study conducted by Jan Soun, a scientist from Germany, that reveals that, for some reason, human beings can't walk in a straight line. There's just something about our inner orientation that causes us to walk in a crooked or warped way. **Soun** blindfolded his subjects and then asked them to walk for an hour in a straight line. Without exception, people couldn't do it. Of course, everybody *thinks* they're walking in a straight line until they remove the blindfolds and see their crooked path. One man writing about this study observed, "**This tendency has been studied now for at least a century. We animated field tests from the 1920s, so you can literally see what happens to men who are blindfolded and told to walk across a field in a straight line, or swim across a lake in a straight line …, and they couldn't. In the animation, you see them going in these strange loop-de-loops in either direction. Apparently, there's a profound inability in humans to [walk] straight.**" **According to this research, there's only one way we can walk in a straight line: by focusing on something ahead of us—like a building, a landmark, or a mountain**. If we can fix our eyes on something ahead of us, we can make ourselves avoid our normal crooked course. THE CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY? **Without external cues, there's apparently something in HUMAN BEINGS that makes us turn [from a straight path**]. (*Steve Inskeep, "Mystery:*

Why We Can't Walk Straight?" NPR: Morning Edition -- 11-22-10) **Hebrews 12:1-2** *tells us what the great men and women of old focused on so that their paths were straight* **(Proverbs 3:5-6)** *and what we should too. "***Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God***.***" THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT THE NATURAL MAN DOES NOT AND CANNOT DO.*

- **The spiritual person**. This is a reference to the believer who has been born again and now has the Spirit of God not only dwelling within him, but leading and guiding him in life. Here's what Paul says about this person in **1 Corinthians 2:15-16 -- The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ**). He is mature because he's filled with the Holy Spirit and can see things from a completely different perspective. In addition, the spiritual man (mature believer) has the mind of Christ and can make the right judgment about ***all*** things because he has both lived in the world (as an unbeliever) and in the kingdom. **The natural man can only make judgments about the world**. (**REVIEW: DISCIPLES OF CHRIST RECEIVE GOD'S WISDOM. UNBELIEVERS DO NOT. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST HAVE THE SPIRIT OF GOD. UNBELIEVERS HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST HAVE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. UNBELIEVERS DO NOT**.)

A disciple follows and learns from Christ. All true believers therefore are disciples because we have believed the same message about Jesus. That's Paul's point in this passage. There can be no deviation from the essentials of the Christian faith for Christ-followers.

- **Christ's disciples accept the message of the cross**. There are only two alternatives when it comes to spiritual wisdom. It is either from the world which is the domain of Satan who blinds the minds of unbelievers or it is from God and sees the cross as the only means for our salvation. There is no middle road, no compromise.

- **Christ's disciples receive revelation from the Holy Spirit**. The point of this passage isn't that there is a secret wisdom known only to a few. Anyone can understand the message of the cross, but only the Holy Spirit can enable someone to believe the message. The reason is because of our own self-centeredness. Our sin is so deep that we cannot truly see the cross without the work of the Spirit in our hearts and minds.
- **Christ's disciples grasp both the depth of our sin and the riches of God's grace**. The unbeliever, however, cannot understand the grace of God. Why … because he only lives in the world corrupted by sin. The believer on the other hand has lived in the world but now lives in the kingdom of God. He has experienced both firsthand and knows the difference.

Conclusion: In his book, ***If I Were God I'd End All Pain***, **John Dickson**, co-founder and director of **the Center for Public Christianity**, recalls speaking on the theme "**The Wounds of God**" at a university campus. After his speech, the chairperson asked the audience for questions. Without delay a man in his mid-30s, a Muslim leader at the university, stood up and proceeded to tell the audience how preposterous was the claim that the Creator of the universe would be subjected to the forces of his own creation—that he would have to eat, sleep, and go to the toilet, let alone die on a cross. Dickson and the man went back and forth for about ten minutes during which the man insisted that the notion of God having wounds—whether physical or emotional—was not only illogical since the "**Creator of Causes**" could not possibly be caused pain by a lesser entity, it was outright blasphemy, as stated in the Koran. Dickson later wrote, "***I had no knock-down argument, no witty comeback. The debate was probably too amicable for either approach anyway. In the end, I simply thanked him for demonstrating to the audience the radical contrast between the Islamic conception of God and that described in the Bible. What the Muslim denounces as blasphemy the Christian holds as precious: God has wounds***." Aaah the message of the cross … foolishness to those who are perishing … but to those whom God has called … it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Have you experienced the power and wisdom of God in your life? Have you come to accept the message of the cross … that Christians worship a crucified Messiah who has conquered sin and death and through faith in Him we, too, discover life, abundant and eternal?