

Diocesan Bible Study  
Fall 2020  
Ephesians 1:17

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*A Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation*

“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him.” –Ephesians 1:17

This verse from early in St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians contains some well-worn words from the Christian lexicon: *spirit*, *wisdom*, and *revelation*. But in the first century, Christians were still discerning and creating a distinct religious vocabulary. Let’s start by letting these words become strange to us again.

What of *spirit*? In the New Testament, when we read passages about *spirit*, we are sometimes reading what will in later generations become the full-blown doctrine of the Trinity. Trinity language talks about God as Divine Persons who are related to each other. The interrelations of these Divine Persons give us a way to understand how we, in turn, relate to God as people who are in Christ, i.e. the Church.

For example, in St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, we read that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells among the gathered Church (8:11), and that this Spirit adopts us as God’s children and heirs. This Spirit calls God “Abba, Father” just as Jesus does (Rom. 8:15, Mark 14:36). So, when God gives this Abba-crying Spirit of Jesus to us, God is bringing us into the same relationship to Him that Jesus has: like Jesus, we call God “Father.” By way of the Spirit, God draws us into the life of His Son, thereby resituating us “inside” the Trinity. This basic re-situating can help us understand what is going on when New Testament authors ask God to send a *spirit* on us.

What of *wisdom and revelation*? This is the only place in the New Testament where these terms are paired so closely, but they are used together elsewhere, especially 1 Corinthians 2:6-13 and 3:10-15. In the former passage, St. Paul describes how the rulers of this age crucified the Lord of glory because they did not have God’s *wisdom*. In other words, they did not recognize Jesus. However, God has *revealed* to those who have the Spirit that the Crucified One *is* the Lord of glory.

In the latter passage, St. Paul uses a building metaphor. The *wise* builder lays Christ as the foundation and builds on top of that. (For NRSV readers: “skilled master builder” in 1 Cor. 3:10 is actually “*wise* master builder.”) On the last great Day, the work of any builder will

be *revealed* by fire for what it truly is. The implication is clear: what is built on Christ will remain; everything else will be burned away.

In both these passages, then, we see God's *wisdom* as a kind of vision: the power to see things clearly. In the former passage (1. Cor 2:6-13), wisdom means recognizing who Jesus really is. In the latter (1 Cor. 3:10-15), wisdom means recognizing that, in the end, only what is built on Christ will remain. Furthermore, in both passages we saw that *revelation* is God's fixing our eyes unflinchingly on the Truth: the Spirit *revealed* to some that the Crucified One is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:10) and on the last great Day, fire will *reveal* Christ as the only true foundation (1 Cor. 3:11-13).

To return to Ephesians 1:17, then, we might say that St. Paul was praying that God would give to the new Church a *spirit* that would grant them the *wisdom* to interpret the world as it was in such a way that it matches the world God will *reveal* to them on the last great Day.

For us, God's wisdom recognizes those who are crucified *now* as the Lord of Glory who will be revealed as such to everyone *then*. God's wisdom recognizes the Crucified One *now* as the foundation on which the Church must build our common life. To build on anything else is to stack kindling for the fire *later*.

There is a judgment at work here. What God has done in Jesus situates us in a narrative of judgment in which recognition of the one we have crucified *as* the Lord of Glory is determinative of what the fire of the last great Day will reveal. To receive God's spirit of wisdom and revelation is to see clearly that we are all—small and great, crucifiers and crucified—*already* in this narrative.

But remember, this spirit of wisdom and revelation is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit brings us into the same relationship to God that Jesus has. The spirit that reveals us to be under God's judgment is also the spirit that secures us firmly in God's own triune life by making us part of the body of his Son, in whom "we have access to God" (Eph. 3:12).

If we would share in this access to God, we should expect this spirit of wisdom and revelation to lead us into the very place where God's wisdom is revealed: the cross. I do not mean that we should expect this spirit to lead us only to recognize Jesus on the cross, but that we should expect to be there with Him. It is there that God recognizes us. This sounds like foolishness in our present age, but on the last great Day when all our monuments to self and tribe and country are tried by fire—what then?

### Questions for Reflection:

- 1.) In our study, we said that God's wisdom recognizes those who are crucified *now* as the Lord of Glory who will be revealed *then* (on "the Day" St. Paul talks about in 1 Cor. 3:13). Who are those who are crucified now, in our country and in your specific community?
- 2.) Keeping in mind your answer to the question above, how do you, your congregation, and your Diocese "recognize" them? What would it look like for the Church as you know it to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation?
- 3.) Later on in Ephesians, St. Paul writes that his own ministry is to help ensure "that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might be made known" (3:10). What does the "rich variety" of God's wisdom look like in the Church? How do you contribute to it, and how might you contribute to it more fully?
- 4.) St. Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17 that God "may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him." The *you* here is plural, not singular, and yet there's only one spirit. What does this suggest about how we should expect to experience "wisdom and revelation?"
- 5.) We said in our study that when we ask God to send us *spirit*, we are asking God to re-situate us securely within Jesus, and therefore within God's own triune life. How have you experienced this security in this tumultuous year?