

Today, more than ever before, preachers and teachers in local churches, are under enormous pressure to perform. Of course, there's always been accomplished public speakers – truly talented orators,,,,, and the church has always had its share of these – Those special articulate people, who have the presence and the charisma, to immediately capture our attention, and to hold us (enthralled) and captivated by their every word...

And years ago, these people would tour the big cities (and maybe even visit some of the more major regional centres) and some people would get to hear them, maybe once a year, if they were lucky, or if they made the effort to travel to some conference event...

That was then.

But now, with the accessibility of Christian Radio and Television, and video on the internet, we can hear world-renowned speakers in the comfort of our own home, any day of the week. Or if you work close enough to the cell-tower, you can spend most of the day listening to brilliant speakers while the Green-Star steers the tractor for you...

And so we, the sermon-listening public – well, we're quite blessed – We're able to listen to any truly great speaker we want to, from anywhere in the world, simply at the press of a button, or the touching a phone screen...

Who wants to listen to ordinary old Joe-Blow when he gets up to speak in the local church anymore? ... And whether it be real, or whether it be perceived, many preachers and teachers don't feel that they can live up to the standard that's being set for them today...

But “pressure to perform” – it’s not a new thing – it may be more emphasised than it used to be, but it’s not entirely new – Paul came under that very pressure at Corinth...

But the thing is, preaching the gospel isn’t about having a thoroughly entertaining message – it’s about bearing witness to Christ. And the purpose of Bible teaching, is to point people to Jesus, and to aid those who have decided to follow Jesus, to be true disciples in the ways **of** Jesus... The teaching ministry is actually **very** important. What’s **not** important, is the charisma of the speaker. But unfortunately, way too often, we go for the charisma, rather than the content...

Look at the example of Paul:

If it wasn’t for the writings of the Apostle Paul, we wouldn’t know anywhere near what we do about Christ and God’s plan of salvation – I think he wrote about 30% of the New Testament... And yet this man was a very ‘unimpressive’ sort of a physical specimen...

In the 2nd century, Paul was described as being: *a short man; with a bald head; crooked legs; a mono-brow; and a hooked nose...*ⁱ

He doesn’t sound like a very impressive sort of a character at all...

And Paul himself admits that he wasn’t a particularly polished sort of a speaker either. He said: ³ **And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,** ⁴ **and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom...**

And you might identify with Paul, in that. He wasn't a great speaker. He trembled when he got up to speak... *You know, for the first dozen or so times I preached, I was so nervous, I had diarrhoea for more than a week leading up to the event...*

But you see, for Paul, the message wasn't about presentational excellence, or being a fine performance... For Paul, it was a **demonstration of the Spirit and of power**. Now, we might jump ahead of ourselves and say "Well, Paul didn't **need** to be a good speaker – he was doing all these miracles and stuff – people would have to listen to him...".. But I'm not sure miracles and signs and wonders is what Paul was talking about, when he said his preaching was a **demonstration of the Spirit and of power** , because back in chapter 1, he downplays the need for "signs"ⁱⁱ

The demonstration of the Spirit's power, is the salvation of those who believe. Despite the unimpressive nature of his preaching – despite the apparent folly of the message, the Holy Spirit moved people to believe (It's every preacher's dream – that despite out bumbling performance, people give their lives to Jesus.).... Do you understand, that this is a greater demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit than when the blind begin to see, and the lame get up and walk....

The transformation of a life – there is no greater demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power....

If you got to choose today, in this very church service – right now, for someone who is confined to a wheel chair, to get up and walk, or for one sinner to repent, and to give their life to Jesus Christ, which would you choose? What would you be

most impressed with??? And yet, you know what God would choose, don't you?

A rebellious heart, yielded to Jesus Christ, is an **enormous** demonstration of God's Power

So, when Paul planted that church in Corinth, the purpose of his preaching, was to **ground** them in the message of the cross, and to **ground** them in the power of God – and **not** in the wisdom or the greatness of men...

But, is that where the message ends? I know some preachers who say “*All we should **ever** preach, is ‘the cross’*”, – “*Paul said ‘I decided to know **nothing** among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.’. That’s where the power of God is – that’s all we should ever preach”*

But that’s not at all what Paul is saying here... What he’s saying is, “We should be **grounded** in the message of the cross – that foolishness to those who don’t believe, but to those who are being saved, it’s the power of God.” Faith begins at the cross... But what then???

Is that the end of the task of the preacher? Is there no further need for a teacher, other than to lay out the path to be saved????

No, that’s not the end of it... Paul goes on to say, ⁶ **Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom.....** and in verse 13 he says that “we” (referring to him and the other bible teachers) interpret **spiritual truths, to those who are spiritual.**

I'm really torn today – I'd really like to take chapters 2 and 3 together, but we just wouldn't have time. When I preach again (in 2 weeks time), we're going to hear Paul say:
3:1....But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready....

Alright, he wants to get us grounded in the Gospel – grounded in the cross... but he doesn't want us to remain as mere infants in Christ. God **wants** us to be growing. He wants **you** to be growing, and He wants **me** to be growing. There's so much more about the mysteries of God for us to be taught... and we shouldn't consider all this as merely useless head knowledge. In **Hebrews**, chapters 5 & 6ⁱⁱⁱ, Paul basically tells us, that we need to be mature, and taught the word of God, to **help** us to distinguish good from evil...

And that's pretty important. Every one of us has to make that judgment call (whether something is good or whether it's evil), every day of the week. It's how we establish at our morals, or our ethics – it's how we live, as children of God. It's knowing:

- Whether I should participate in something, or whether I should abstain from it;
- How I should vote in the Australian marriage survey;
- Is it OK to drink alcohol?
- What about getting drunk? Is **that** OK?

- Does a mother have a right to kill her unborn baby?; or
- What about euthanasia? Is it OK to put somebody old and sick out of their misery by finishing them off?
- What about dating? Is it wise to begin dating someone who is **not** a Christian?
- What about shacking up with my boyfriend or my girlfriend – what does God have to say about that?
- Is it OK to get a divorce?
- Or is it ever OK marry a person who **is** divorced?
- What about IVF? Is that OK? Or isn't it???
- When should I obey the law of the land, and when should I disobey it?
- Is it right to discipline my children and **how** should I discipline my children???
- How should I relate to unrepentant sinners?
- What about if that unrepentant sinner is in the church? What then?

These are just examples of questions that **all** of us have to grapple with (every day). They're examples of questions about how we properly live out the Christian life, as disciples of Jesus.... And how are we going to know the answers to these questions?

Even though **not** every modern issue, is specifically addressed in the Scriptures, the principles are all there, and as we study God's word, answers can be found...

But here's the thing: only the spiritually mature, will understand what God has to say on these things, and only the spiritually mature, will accept and obey, what God **does** say...

V14 summarises it by saying: ¹⁴ The natural person (psyche – mind – the thoughts) 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.

*Do you always know what I'm thinking? Of course you don't always know what I'm thinking. Out of everyone here, Robyn knows me best, and I even surprise her sometimes... We can guess what somebody else is thinking, but we don't really know what they're thinking, do we? I can't know what you're thinking, unless you tell me, because I'm not you. And even if you **do** tell me what you're thinking, I still mightn't be able to understand your reasoning, because the only one who **can** understand you (apart from God), is you.*

And V11 says: no one comprehends the thoughts of **God except the Spirit of God**.

I can't know the will of God, because I'm a human. If I want to know the will of God – If I want to understand the **thinking** of God – if I want to understand the things freely given to us by God : The freedom; The boundaries; The grace; the love; the forgiveness; His direction; His ethics (what is good and what is evil) If I want to comprehend the thoughts of God, the only way, is to be spiritually mature – to be filled with the Spirit of God.

That's why some people make such a 'hash' out of interpreting the Bible, because their starting point, and their processing filter is their own human thoughts and their heart's desires....

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;

I reckon the most dangerous part of Biblical interpretation, is humanly speaking, we crave self-justification... We want to be right. We like to see ourselves and our choices as "righteous"... But the only way to rightly comprehend the thoughts of God, is to have the Spirit of God.

Sometimes it's difficult to know what God is saying...
Sometimes it's difficult to obey...

The natural person – if I'm letting my human psyche – my human thoughts, rule in my life, I'm going to have difficulty understanding what God says, on a given matter..

But sometimes we know **exactly** what God says about how we should act, and once again, because we're not living by the Spirit, and because we're letting the flesh reign, we **act** contrary, to what God says is right...

So, the person who is spiritually mature – the person who is living by the Spirit, 'gets it'. When a teacher rightly teaches them God's word, they 'get it' – they understand it – they **know** what God's will is. And so they obey it.

But if we're **not** spiritually mature – If we're living by the flesh, (letting our own thoughts, and our deceitful heart rule), when a teacher rightly teaches us God's word, we just don't 'get it' – we just cannot comprehend why God would expect this of us, and so we disobey God, **or** we **do** understand, and we **still** disobey God – even though we know it's wrong. This, is a sign of spiritual **immaturity** – where we let the **flesh** rule; where we let our own thoughts rule; and let our heart rule, rather than the Spirit....

So, what does it mean to be “spiritually mature”? You might be sitting here thinking, “Well, I'm only a relatively new Christian. There's people here who have been Christians for many decades, but me, I'm only a new-comer – what hope do I have, of discerning God's will?”

Well, a lot of hope actually:

- Spiritual maturity, isn't so much about how long one has been a Christian;
- It's not about whether you've been to Bible college;
- It's not about whether you were born into a Christian family;
- It's not about whether you're a good speaker, or a 'celebrity' Christian of some kind.
- It's not even about how many jobs you do in the church;
- Not even Spiritual Gifts are a sign of spiritual maturity. *You might know someone who can prophesy, or heal the sick, or speak in tongues, or they might have faith that can move a mountain, or they might have **all** of those*

gifts... But not even Spiritual Giftedness is a sign of spiritual maturity. (In fact, we're going to see that later in this letter, where the spiritually immature were **destroying** the church in Corinth, in the way they used their spiritual gifts.)

Sometimes our perspective can be very wrong about what "spiritual maturity" is. Paul *redefined* "spiritual maturity" in terms of *Christlikeness*^{iv}.

Those who are Christ-like, are the spiritually mature. They are like Christ. He talks about having the mind of Christ (nous; intellect; understanding; reason; what makes Christ tick). And the best way I can describe to you what it means to be Christ-like, is to describe the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, is all about our character – the way we relate to God **AND** the way we relate to others.

Galatians 5:22 love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control
To become spiritually mature, is to become Christ-like...

Something to keep in mind, is this letter was written a church, that was tearing itself apart. There were some there, who were arguing with one another, and fighting with one another, (over spiritual issues, and over moral issues)...

"I follow this teacher"

"Well, I follow that teacher."

"I know what's right – you don't."

"No, I know what's right – you don't."

And Paul just turns all this arguing and bickering on its head – “You think you know the mind of God, well you’re certainly not demonstrating it.”, but I’m getting a bit ahead of myself, because that’s what’s is coming in chapter 3 – We won’t know the mind of God, unless we have the Spirit of God. And if we have the Spirit of God, then we’ll have the mind of Christ...

Verse ¹⁵ **The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.**

None of us like to be judged, do we... It is so hurtful, when we believe we’ve done the right thing, and acted appropriately, and yet others judge us... But if there’s **one** thing that will make people judge us faster than anything, it’s when we judge others. Jesus said that when we start judging others, that same measure will get used, against us. The finger that I point at others, will get pointed back at me^v...

But here’s a better way: ¹⁵ **The spiritual person judges all things** (that means to decide; to resolve; to interpret spiritual truths), **but is himself to be judged by no one.** How does that come about? Well, it’s because they’re a spiritual person...

In Galatians, where the fruit of the Spirit are listed, it ends by saying “**against such things, there is no law.**” In other words, “If we live by the Spirit, and our actions, are the very Christ-like actions of **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**; If we exude these fruit of the Spirit, when we hear God’s word

being taught, we will understand God's word – it will make sense to us, and we'll be walking in step with the spirit, and nobody will have grounds to rightly accuse us, or to judge us.

That's where the Pharisees got it wrong. You know how Jesus used to always get up the Pharisees???? ... They presumed to know the mind of God, and they would judge others harshly (in a manner that they believed was "according to the word of God"), but they were interpreting it through their own thoughts – their own mind,,,,, and their actions were anything but Christ-like...

...

I find 1 Corinthians 2 **really** encouraging, and I hope you do too. You and I – we don't have to fall into the trap of the Pharisees. We don't have to fall into the trap of the Spiritually immature Corinthian church... We **can know** the mind of God. That's pretty encouraging, isn't it??? We can know the mind of God, because God has given us His Holy Spirit... The **challenge** for us, is to live that Christ-like life, seeking above all things, the fruit of the Spirit, in our own lives, so that we are living **by** the Spirit, and have the mind of Christ... Isn't that good news????

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is, to be a child of God. We thank you, that in your grace, you call the sinner; the broken; the lowly; the nobodies, to have the mind of Christ. And we praise you Lord, that by Your Holy Spirit, even the most simple soul, can understand Your word when it is taught. Lord, we pray that you will increase our spiritual maturity,

That we would know, and obey the mind of God,
As we live a Christ-like life.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

ⁱ Cited from E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, vol. 2 (Lutterworth, 1965), p. 354.
In: Morris, L., 1985. *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 1:22–24 (ESV) ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hebrews 5:11–6:8 (ESV) **Warning Against Apostasy**
¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

^{iv} Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

^v Matthew 7:1–5 (ESV)

Judging Others

7 "Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.