

A Study of 1 Corinthians

Chapter 2

The Word of God, Wisdom, and Foolishness

God's Wisdom Is Presented in the Message of the Crucified Christ

Paul offered the example of his preaching of the cross among the Corinthians as a further illustration of what the wisdom of God can do in contrast to what human wisdom may do.

The Presentation of God's Testimony Is Not Marked by Techniques to Manipulate a Response

Verse 1—Paul brought this gospel message to them in Acts 18 *and when I came to you, brethren.*

- When he came, his presentation was not marked *with superiority of speech*, trying to outshine the rhetoric displayed in Corinth. In fact, he had described himself as *unskilled in speech* (1 Corinthians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 11:6;).
- Neither did he come with [*superiority*] *of wisdom*—that is, the wisdom of the world that prioritizes eloquence and is devoid of spiritual discernment. In chapter one salvation cannot be obtained by worldly wisdom. Here it cannot be presented with worldly wisdom.
- His message was a simple, straightforward *proclaiming* (καταγγέλλων announcing or making known) *the testimony of God's* salvation message, in simple terms without sensationalism. This testimony was revelation about the cross and the gospel that the apostle had received from God and taught the Corinthians.

The Presentation Was in a Manner that Demonstrated the Power of God

Verse 2—He *determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.* Again, it is about the message, not the manner of presentation.

- He was not there to make a name for himself.
- The apostle intentionally set aside anything that might prop up the message of the gospel.
- *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* emphasized the payment being made for sin. That's what salvation is—faith alone in a payment for sin.
- Our message is spiritual and supernatural, not earthy and social. This message was not cluttered by philosophy or clouded by rhetoric to make it more appealing.
- When Paul came to Corinth, he focused on the testimony of God about Christ and His crucifixion.

Verse 3—The manner in which he presented this message was in *weakness, and in fear, and much trembling* (τρόμῳ πολλῷ quaking with much fear and anxiety), which may have had to do with how he thought the gospel might be received in Corinth.

- His presentation was unimpressive from a human point of view. There was not a reliance or confidence upon his own abilities and methods of persuasion.
- So it's clear that Paul did not travel to Corinth with confidence in His ability to persuade.

Verse 4—The content Paul said of *my message (the testimony of God in Jesus Christ and Him crucified) and my preaching*, that is, the proclamation of this message from God, was not presented *in persuasive* (πειθοῖ to entice) *words of wisdom* (of men).

- It was neither a performance to impress with knowledge or philosophical persuasion.

- He did not adjust his content or style to accommodate the Corinthians and compete with worldly wisdom.
- *But it was in demonstration* (ἀποδείξει manifestation or proof) *of the Spirit and of power*. There were no techniques designed to manipulate a response with a message void of the crucifixion. It was the Holy Spirit who persuaded the Corinthians to believe the gospel.
- The process was a simple one—Paul proclaimed God’s testimony embodied in the crucifixion, and the Corinthians believed.

Verse 5—The purpose for such an emphasis on this demonstration *of the Spirit and power is so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men*.

- Had Paul persuaded the Corinthians by clever reasoning and grounded the gospel upon worldly eloquence, his message and ministry would have perished with the wisdom of the age.
- *But it rested instead upon the power of God*, which was the conviction of the Holy Spirit through his simple presentation of God’s testimony of Christ.
- Belief in the work of God through Christ’s crucifixion was a product of the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit *on the power of God*, not the outcome of human persuasion.

God’s Wisdom Is Understood by Spiritual Enlightenment, Not Human Discovery

God’s Wisdom Is Not Humanly Discovered

Verse 6—There is a wisdom *we do speak...among those who are mature* (τελείοις complete, full grown).

- The apostle spoke the wisdom of God by revelation.
- The *mature* are those who recognize God’s wisdom revealed to the apostle as true and superior to worldly and cultural wisdom. The mature understand God’s viewpoint from that revelation.
- They also certainly know that God’s wisdom is *not of this age nor of rulers of this age, who are passing away*. God’s wisdom is the antithesis of secular worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom *is passing away* (καταργουμένων useless, to cease or be done away) transitory, subject to change, obsolete, and eventually coming to nothing.
- In contrast, God’s testimony is eternal truth.

Verse 7—*But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery* that is, revelation that was not previously disclosed by God. It was something *hidden* (ἀποκεκρυμμένην concealed or kept secret) by God, which *God predestined before the ages* prior to creation.

- The wisdom of God previously hidden and then proclaimed by Paul was embodied in the gospel message of the crucifixion of payment for sin. The message of the cross was a further unfolding of God’s plan and purpose.
- God withheld information to be progressively revealed in His plan from Genesis through Revelation.
- The plan of God through the gospel was *for our glory*, which is our ultimate glorification, our future glory in heaven.
- Paul is God’s agent to bring this message out of hiding, from where it was concealed by God before creation for at least 4000 years.

Verse 8—God’s wisdom, the testimony of God in the crucified Christ, *which none of the rulers of this age has understood* was not grasped by the leaders of Christ’s and Paul’s time in human history. Pilate, Herod, the religious leaders and the Sanhedrin all failed to recognize *the Lord of glory*.

- The reason for their ignorance was *if they had understood it* (God’s wisdom in the crucifixion) *they would not have crucified God’s Son*.
- Jesus testified to this ignorance when He said, “*Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34).

- Knowledge of the wisdom of God would have kept the Jews from crucifying their own Messiah. He was the hope and expectation of their nation. All their desires were centered in Him and to Him they looked for deliverance from all their foes.
- That is why God had kept the cross hidden until now. The crucifixion was central to God's plan, and without it, there would be no payment for sin.
- Their ignorance of divine wisdom, a mystery hidden previously, incomprehensible to the world, was the crucifixion Passover payment by Christ for sin.
- The phrase *Lord of glory* connects our glory to Christ's through whom our union with Him guarantees our experience of that eternal glory.

Verse 9—Paul quoted from Isaiah 64:4, *things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man* that emphasized his point about the things we can know only by revelation from God, that human wisdom cannot fathom.

- For Israel in Isaiah's day, deliverance from captivity would come after 70 years of exile.
- But an even greater promise of deliverance comes from the wisdom of God in the crucified Christ.
- There is no method of apprehension of this reality open to man's natural eyes, ears, hearts, or mind other than God's revelation of it.
- Man's wisdom can know some things by observation in nature or creation, but he can only learn of God's provision in Christ by revelation.
- Those *are the things God has prepared for those who love Him*. So the more God revealed, much of it progressively, the more clearly we see that He has designed His plans for us, to our benefit.
- Over time, the more God progressively reveals, the better we comprehend His plan for humanity and for His people.

God's Wisdom was Revealed through Spiritual Enlightenment

Verse 10—*God has revealed these to us by the Spirit*, that is, God disclosed the gospel, His view of the world, and its benefit to us, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit of God who disclosed God's revelation in the form of the Scriptures to human authors.

- What secular wisdom cannot discover, God has revealed.
- This special revelation was written down for us in the pages of Scripture.
- *To us* refers to believers who find eternal, absolute truth, in that Scripture, where these wonderful mysteries God has planned for believers is found.
- The testimony of God in the crucified Christ is a product of the Spirit who *searches* (ἐραυνᾷ examines and investigates) *all things, even the deep things of God* about salvation.
- This revelation is from the profound depths of God's own wisdom and could not be a product of human ingenuity. These things are revealed in the Word of God.

Verse 11—We can never know another person like we know ourselves *for who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him*. It takes a human being to understand things pertaining to human life.

- In the same way, also no one knows *the thoughts of God... except the Spirit of God* who alone is able to deliver God's revelation through inspiration. The Spirit of God can know God and God's viewpoint thoroughly, because He is God.
- So revelation is God disclosing the content of Scripture.
- Inspiration is God superintending the process of writing down that revelation.
- So Paul says that what he received came from God, not man's worldly wisdom.

Verse 12—As believers *we have received, not the spirit of the world* that is, merely secular wisdom, the prevailing principles of society, subject to changing popular opinion, *but the Spirit who is from God*. We have been indwelt by this Spirit.

- God has moved into our lives *so that we may know the things freely given* (χαρισθέντα to give graciously to grant as favor) *to us by God*.
- The Holy Spirit has given us this information in the Word of God.
- Not only have we *received* the indwelling of God's Spirit, the inspiration of Scripture by means of the Holy Spirit is also an act of God's grace.

Verse 13—The apostles delivered the *things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom*.

- Jesus had clarified that the *Spirit will guide you* (the disciples) *into all the truth* (John 16:13). This guaranteed the writing of Scripture would communicate divine truth not mere human instruction. *But* that divine truth was *with those* (words) *instructed by the Spirit*.
- So the Holy Spirit superintended the process of inspiration so that what was recorded was the Word of God.
- The apostles did not pass on mere human secular wisdom.
- The point of it all was *explaining spiritual things to spiritual people* (πνευματικὰ believers).
- The inspiration of divine truth was a combination of revelation brought to believers who willingly received it, studied it, and benefitted from it.
- What we have is literally God's Word.

Verse 14—This is about the *natural man* (ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος the unbeliever) who *does not receive* the Word of God, though he can perceive it.

- He does not *receive* (δέχεται to accept or take hold of) *the things of the Spirit of God* (the Scriptures), because *they are foolishness* (μωρία silly or absurd) *to him*.
- If *the things of the Spirit of God* are foolish to him, then he must understand the Bible in order to reject them.
- So what is it about the gospel that the natural man does not *understand* or *know* or *recognize* or *perceive*? He doesn't *understand* that it's true.
- A believer understands the message of evolution, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, but he doesn't understand them to be true.
- So the unbeliever does not receive the things of God in Scripture, not because he cannot comprehend their meaning but because he does not believe it to be true.
- These things are *spiritually appraised* in the sense that they are understood to truthfully reveal the mind of God.

Verse 15—Paul said, *he who is spiritual* (πνευματικός a believer) *appraises* [judges or examines] *all things*.

- The spiritual man has discernment from God's Word enabling him to make accurate judgments about everything, including the depths of evil, the reality of holiness, and the necessity of the righteous life.
- This puzzles the natural man who is unable to accurately *appraise* the values and virtues of the spiritual man who *he himself is appraised by no one*.
- An unbeliever has no context to evaluate a believer because the Word of God is *foolishness* to him. A believer's values and virtues do not connect with an unbeliever. He is incapable of assessing their truthfulness. He is spiritually blind.

Verse 16—These things of the Spirit are understood by believers because we look at them from Christ's point of view, *we have the mind* [mentality or perspective or worldview] *of Christ*.

- Believers understand the Word to be true.
- Once we have the mind of Christ, we can spiritually appraise all things.
- The believer has the mind of Christ because he has the Bible, the revelation of the mind of God, and he believes the Bible to be true.

- The Bible as the revelation of the mind of God is the opposite of the dominate prevailing wisdom of the world today.

Application

The understanding of God comes from the Spirit of God to the people of God who are spiritual. It is not available to the natural man. There is no way to get to God. He must come to you. An unbeliever is unwilling to connect the dots from God's Word to what is true. That's why the Bible and salvation are foolishness. One cannot get to the truth of God's Word or perspective by human wisdom. You need the enlightenment of the Spirit for that—which is agreeing with the Spirit that God's revelation is true.