

Team Playbook

LESSON 2



Topic

The wisdom of God

Theme

The Bible, God's fully inspired and reliable Word, forms the basis of team church's ministry and message.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will use the Spirit's illumination ministry as a motive for diligently studying God's Word.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 4

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 2

Summary

Paul reminded team church that he preached Jesus Christ so they might put their faith in the wisdom of God rather than in him. He then went on to demonstrate that the wisdom of God, or God's Word, is far superior to the wisdom of man. God's Word is a result of revelation and inspiration. And understanding and applying God's Word is a result of illumination. Consequently, God's Word served as Paul's playbook for team church.

Outline

I. Paul's Preaching (2:1–8)

- A. Focus: Christ crucified (2:1, 2)
- B. Effect: Faith in God (2:3–5)
- C. Foundation: Wisdom of God (2:6–8)

II. Paul's Reception of God's Word (2:9–16)

- A. Revelation of God's Word (2:9–11)
- B. Inspiration of God's Word (2:12, 13)
- C. Illumination of God's Word (2:14–16)

Memory Verse

*"For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?
but we have the mind of Christ"
(1 Corinthians 2:16).*

GETTING STARTED

Ad Techniques and the Gospel

Ask the learners to form several small groups. Distribute two or three newspaper, magazine, or web ads to each group. Ask the groups to decide the persuasion techniques behind the ads (e.g., fear, guilt, greed). After several minutes, let each group report its decision.

ASK: Why might the ads be effective? (Q1)

ASK: Must we use advertising methods of sorts to get people to buy into the gospel? Explain. (Q2) *No. The gospel is powerful because it is God's method of shining the light of God's truth into a sinner's darkened heart.*

Paul understood that sharing the gospel unleashes God's power to affect the lost. God's power, not any advertising technique, makes the gospel effective. People will respond to it because God has chosen to work through it. In this lesson, we will see Paul's testimony concerning the power of the gospel and the reliability of God's Word in general.

Important Letter

Mail carriers brave all kinds of weather to deliver the mail. Through snow, sleet, rain, hail, heat, and cold they carry written messages to millions of addressees. The mail must get through—even though at times it is only junk mail.

The apostle Paul was not a mail carrier, but he gladly braved all kinds of adversity to deliver a message to as many people as possible. That message came from God, was addressed to whosoever will, and had life-changing power. It was God's reliable Word.

ASK: If you were as effective at delivering the mail as you are at witnessing, would you still have a job as a mail carrier?

ASK: What might someone conclude about the importance of the gospel based on your life?

In this lesson, we will see Paul's testimony concerning the power of the gospel and the reliability of God's Word. Both should motivate us to share the gospel faithfully.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Paul's Preaching (2:1–8)

A. Focus: Christ crucified (2:1, 2)

Paul's desire to preach Christ shaped his epistle. He drew sharp contrasts between the wisdom of God and Greek wisdom and philosophy. First Corinthians, then, is a manual for dealing not only with church problems, but also with human philosophies and the evil fruit they bear in people's lives.

Paul opened 1 Corinthians 2 by stating that when he visited Corinth for the first time (Acts 18:1–18), he did not rely on compelling oratory or Greek philosophical reasoning to affect the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:1). He did not try to win them to himself by impressing them with his ability to share his words of human wisdom. That is what the Greek philosophers did. They gained power by gaining followers. Similarly, bloggers today spout words of human wisdom in hopes of gaining more followers and becoming a more powerful, respected voice in the blogosphere. Paul did not worry about who followed *him*; he cared about who followed *Christ*. So he simply preached *Jesus Christ, and him crucified* (2:2).

B. Effect: Faith in God (2:3–5)

Paul preached *in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling* (2:3). He preached *in weakness* in that he humbly set himself aside and focused his message on Christ. He preached *in fear and trembling* because of the seriousness of his responsibility and the seriousness of the message he conveyed. He feared that the Corinthians, who desperately needed the gospel, would reject the message of salvation. Paul was gripped by the fact that the eternal destinies of hundreds of thousands of people were on the line.

ASK: What about Corinth would have given Paul reason to fear the Corinthians would reject the gospel? (Q3) *The city was known for their indulgent lifestyles. They did not often say no to self.*

The very fact that Paul was plain-speaking, weak, and fearful made it clear that the Corinthian converts were drawn to Christ by the Spirit and not by the wisdom and charm of the speaker. Clearly, Paul revered God's Word. He did not try to embellish it; he just preached it as it was to people as they were.

Paul understood the seriousness of the gospel message and his need to rely on the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the lost. Notice that it was the inward *demonstration of the Spirit* (2:4) that Paul considered more powerful than any sign miracle or any word of eloquent wisdom. The same power that Paul had is available to us today through the Holy Spirit whenever we share God's self-authenticating Word. The Holy Spirit will use His power to draw some unbelievers to faith in Christ through the gospel (cf. 1:24).

ASK: Do you think a person must first convince a sinner that God is the creator of the world before he can share the gospel with him? Is the gospel powerless to overcome man's ignorance of God? (Q4) *The gospel is accompanied by the power of God. We should not sell it short, thinking that the gospel is unable to affect the heart of even an evolutionist or an atheist.*

Paul did not try to amuse the Corinthians with his oratory and human ingenuity as they were accustomed to in the secular Greek culture. He wanted to do all he could to stay out of the way of the Spirit-empowered gospel so the Corinthians would have genuine faith in God rather than a meaningless faith in him (2:5).

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:5. **ASK:** What might be some characteristics of a preacher who is more concerned about attracting followers than he is about

affecting hearts? (Q5) *He tailors his message to please his listeners. He is careful not to say anything offensive or controversial. He focuses on how he preaches more than he does on what he preaches.*

ASK: Describe a time when you experienced the Spirit's heart-changing work after hearing a message based on God's Word. (Q6)

Paul viewed himself as a herald. His responsibility was to deliver the gospel plainly so that the audience would understand it and heed it. He did not obscure the message by trying to embellish it. Nor did he detract from it by drawing attention to himself.

The tendency today is to alter the gospel to present something that is more palatable and seemingly more relevant to the listeners. For example, some preachers describe the gospel as a *personal journey of finding one's way to God*. Such men leave open what exactly that way is. The Bible is very clear that there is only one way to the Father. Paul preached about the Way, Jesus Christ. As a result, many sinners in Corinth put their trust in the Christ for salvation.

We should note that since Paul's simple gospel could win the day in the wicked city of Corinth, we can be assured that its power can triumph anywhere. We should never limit where we share God's Word. Its power can change the vilest sinner.

C. Foundation: Wisdom of God (2:6–8)

Paul was not opposed to all wisdom. He is certainly not saying that ministers should not give themselves to gaining true, Biblical wisdom and to understanding theological precision. He is saying that he did not adopt the wisdom of worldly rulers, who are doomed to fail (2:6). But he did *speak wisdom among them that are perfect*, a reference to believers (2:6). Paul's point is that some sinners in Corinth responded to the wisdom of God, the preaching of Christ crucified.

The cross has always been God's solution to sin. Even before God launched the ages of human history, He in wisdom planned the cross (2:7; cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:19, 20; Rev.13:8). The whole Bible, then, points to Calvary as the place where God provided redemption in Christ. But this wisdom about the cross and salvation is not readily accepted by all who hear it. Some rejected even Paul's preaching. Why? Because the gospel is a mystery to unbelievers until the Spirit works in their hearts to allow them to comprehend and accept the truth.

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:8. **ASK:** What did Paul write about the world's religious and political leaders who crucified Christ? (Q7) *They were spiritually ignorant and operated according to the wisdom of this world when they crucified Christ.*

Without the Holy Spirit's intervention, even the world's leaders could not comprehend the wisdom of God in giving His Son on the cross for salvation. In fact, it was the elite of the Jewish and Roman nations that proved this by crucifying *the Lord of glory* (2:8). By executing God's Son, the rulers served as an example of spiritual ignorance. Of course, Paul serves as a shining example of the gospel's power to make wise those who are spiritually blind.

TESTIMONY: Share how your view about Christ's death changed dramatically when the Holy Spirit enabled you to understand the gospel. (Q8)

II. Paul's Reception of God's Word (2:9–16)

Paul went on to describe the process God used to reveal His wisdom to humanity so that they might understand Him and their need for salvation. God gave Paul and other writers His Word through revelation and inspiration. He then communicates the truth of His revealed and inspired Word through illumination.

A. Revelation of God's Word (2:9–11)

Revelation is a disclosure of God's truth that would be otherwise unknowable. Unbelievers cannot comprehend spiritual truth (2:9). The scientific method cannot uncover it. Higher education cannot fathom it. Nor can the human senses grasp it. In fact, unbelievers do not even consider spiritual truths in their hearts (2:9). Their hearts are darkened and devoid of spiritual understanding.

God used the Holy Spirit to reveal His Word to Paul and others who then recorded God's revealed truth (2:10). The phrases *all things* and *deep things* gives the dimensions of God's revelation of truth. The former refers to the extent of the revelation. No topic is missing from God's revelation. The latter refers to the depth of God's revelation. No details about God's revelation are missing. God's revelation of His Word supplies all we need to know about His plans and provisions for us. God's revealed Word is *complete*.

God used the Holy Spirit to impart His revelation to humanity (2:11). It is the Spirit's part in revealing God's truth that makes God's Word *perfect*. For the Spirit knows God perfectly and can communicate His truth flawlessly. Paul likened the Spirit's knowledge of God the Father to a person's knowledge of himself. Paul is essentially saying that the Spirit knows God's truth because He is God.

ASK: What two words would you use to describe God's revelation of His Word based on 2 Corinthians 2:10 and 11? (Q9) *Perhaps complete and perfect.*

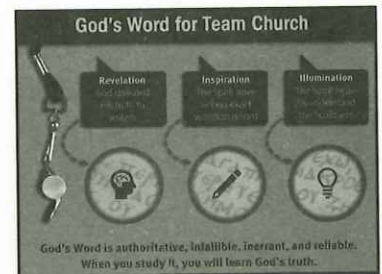
Rejecting God's revelation leads to the dangerous extreme of rationalism on the one hand, believing only that which one can understand, or mysticism on the other, denying that there is objective truth and that knowledge of spiritual truth can be attained through opening one's minds to *mystical* forces. We need God's infallible guidance to understand the spiritual world. We have no basis to assume that it is simply a logical extension of what we perceive in the natural world. Thus, rationalism and mysticism are unsound. We must bow to the authority of the Bible, God's complete and perfect revelation.

RESOURCE: Display the first statement of resource 4 concerning God's revealing His Word.

B. Inspiration of God's Word (2:12, 13)

The second important term concerning God's communication of His Word is *inspiration*. Paul specified that the Spirit of God transmitted God's truth to him and other authors of Scripture (the *we* in 2:12). Years earlier, Jesus predicted the inspiration of New Testament Scripture: *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all*

Verse 9 is most likely a loose quotation of Isaiah 64:4. It appears that the verse is meant as a general statement about the message of the Old Testament rather than a direct quote from any particular Old Testament verse.



things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit guided each writer of Scripture, including Paul, to select the very words God wanted included in the Bible. The content of Scripture was *not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth* (1 Cor. 2:13). Notice that Paul is talking about specific words. This is the doctrine of *verbal* inspiration—that God inspired the exact words that He desired to place in the text.

The phrase, *comparing spiritual things with spiritual* (2:13), is better rendered *matching spiritual thoughts with spiritual words*. The Holy Spirit did not allow the writers to put any words into the sixty-six books of the Bible that God wanted left out, and He did not allow the writers to leave any words out that God wanted in. He guided their exact words that communicated exact spiritual thoughts.

READ: 2 Peter 1:21. **ASK:** What is the message of this verse? (Q10) *The Scriptures are the result of the Holy Spirit moving writers to pen God's words.*

The writers of Scripture had distinct personalities, different vocabulary ranges, and individual writing styles that are reflected in God's Word. But remember that God gave them their personalities and intentionally used those personalities to communicate exactly what He wanted them to write as the Holy Spirit bore them along. That their personalities are apparent in God's Word is part of God's plan to communicate His truth.

Liberal theologians regard the Bible as simply a religious book—inspiring in some respects but not inspired, and certainly not reliable. Neo-orthodox theologians believe the Bible is the product of writers who had encounters with God and shared their insights based on those encounters. They claim a Bible passage becomes the Word of God whenever it speaks to the reader. These are false teachings regarding the nature of Scripture. The Bible does not merely become the Word of God; it is the Word of God.

Furthermore, the Bible is not a subjective revelation; it is an objective revelation. Its validity does not depend upon the feelings of its readers. Instead of being judged by its readers, it judges its readers.

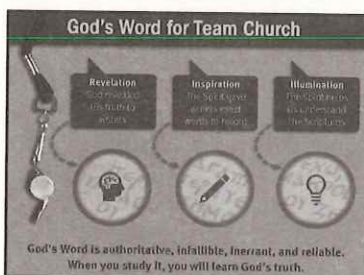
Biblical theologians are correct in rejecting both the liberal view and the neo-orthodox view in favor of the Bible's own claim that it is God's Word in its entirety. Second Timothy 3:16 states, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God*. Literally, this translates, *All scripture is God-breathed*.

ASK: Why is it important for us to understand the nature of Biblical inspiration? (Q11) *The authority of God's Word is based on whether it is inspired.*

The very words of Scripture are inspired and every part of Scripture is as inspired as the other parts. Second Chronicles is as inspired as the Gospel of John. The term verbal inspiration, as we have seen, means that all the words of Scripture are inspired. Plenary inspiration, on the other hand, means the Bible is inspired in all its parts. Because the whole Bible is the inspired Word of God, it is authoritative, inerrant, infallible, and reliable.

RESOURCE: Display the second section of resource 4 about inspiration.

A focus on subjective revelation (mysticism) is once again a major emphasis in the culture and the professing church. It has made extensive inroads into evangelicalism through dangerous trends such as contemplative prayer and other attempts to listen to God's voice outside of His objective revelation in Holy Scripture.



C. Illumination of God's Word (2:14–16)

Because the *natural man* is spiritually dead, he does not have the Holy Spirit to guide his understanding of spiritual truth (2:14). But the believer—*he that is spiritual* (2:15)—can learn and understand spiritual truth in God's Word. The word *judgeth* (2:15) refers to the spiritual person's ability to draw correct conclusions about spiritual things recorded in God's Word.

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:14, 15. **ASK:** How would you respond to a believer who says he doesn't read the Bible because he can't understand it? (Q12) *That he needs to commit to studying God's Word because the Holy Spirit is with him to illuminate the Scriptures and guide his understanding.*

The unregenerate *one* (2:15) lacks the Spirit's presence in his life and therefore cannot rightly judge a spiritual person regarding spiritual things. So when an unregenerate person concludes a spiritual person is a fool, he is doing so from a position of ignorance. He is the one playing the fool.

ASK: Should we be offended when an unregenerate person calls us fools for our beliefs? How should we respond to such a judgment? (Q13) *We should not be offended when we are called fools for our beliefs. Instead, we should continue to share the gospel with our accusers, realizing that the gospel is the only catalyst powerful enough to change their hearts.*

Paul's question in verse 16 reiterates the fact that the unregenerate person does not know the *mind of the Lord* and therefore cannot pass judgment on the Lord. He lacks the Spirit to help him see God's truth. By contrast, the believer has the *mind of Christ* (2:16). The Holy Spirit gives the believer the ability to understand spiritual things so accurately that his understanding aligns with Christ's understanding of truth. That amazing truth should drive us to study God's Word diligently. As we study, our prayer should be, *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law* (Ps. 119:18).

RESOURCE: Display the third section of resource 4 about illumination and the final statement at the bottom of the resource.

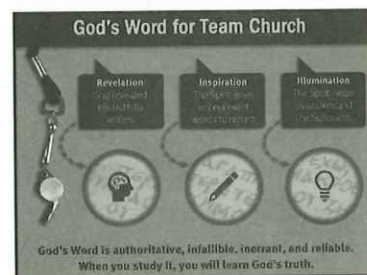
MAKING IT PERSONAL

A Reason to Study

ASK: How does learning about the Holy Spirit's illuminating ministry in the life a believer affect your desire to study God's Word? (Q14)

ASK: What will you do to give the Holy Spirit more opportunities to illuminate the truth in God's Word? (Q15)

Studying God's Word requires a measure of time and discipline. Most likely you won't profit from devotional *soundbites*.



Sharing God's Word

ASK: How have you shared God's Word with an unbeliever recently? (Q16)

ASK: What are some ways you could use Scripture in witnessing to the unsaved? (Q17) *Memorize Scripture, give a person a Bible or a tract, or direct them to a message on your church website.*

ASK: With whom will you share the gospel this week? (Q18)

You do not need to rely on your own eloquence when sharing the gospel. Speak simply and plainly, allowing the supernatural power of the gospel to convict and bring understanding. Of utmost importance is the gospel, which God will ultimately bless—not your rhetorical excellence.

You should rejoice to know that God's Word is a powerful tool that can change the heart of even the most hardened sinner.

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Make use of the Spirit's illumination ministry.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 2:16. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.

