

2:1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

The theological principle expressed in chapter 1 has a practical application, even in Paul's ministry to the Corinthians.

The word in verse 1 translated as "superiority" is *huperoche* (ὑπεροχή), a word that has to do with height. The NRSV translates it as "lofty" words. God determined to save men apart from human wisdom so Paul deliberately bore testimony about God (II Thess. 2:10; 1 Cor. 1:6) in a way that avoided using high-sounding speech and argumentation to persuade men to believe. Such a presentation of the gospel would impede the gospel by putting what pleases the audience first. Whenever he proclaimed the gospel message, he avoided "preaching for effect" but was determined to preach nothing but Christ crucified, a message that the world could not comprehend.

The word "proclaim" has a very broad meaning; in 11:26 the Lord's death is proclaimed by those who participate in communion, in Acts 13:5 the word of the Lord is proclaimed in the synagogue, in Romans 1:8 the faith of the believers (evidenced by their whole testimony) is said to be proclaimed everywhere, and in Acts 26:23 light is proclaimed to the Gentiles. In verse 17 Paul described his preaching in the same way.

"To know nothing among you" means that Paul's single focus and passion was to tell others of Christ crucified. He didn't cloud his mind with other issues that led him away into tangents of relative unimportance. He did only what would serve to forward the gospel of Christ, regardless of people's expectations or desires to have their ears tickled.

2:3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

Verses 1 and 2 focused on *the way* that Paul preached. Verse 3 focuses on Paul's *mindset* when he preaches.

Although Paul had physical weakness, the weakness in 2:3 could refer to weakness of mind.

Paul's "fear and trembling" could have been due to the huge responsibility that he felt. "It was not in the consciousness of strength, self-confident and self-relying, that he appeared among them, but oppressed with his sense of weakness and insufficiency. He had work to do which he felt to be entirely above his powers" (Hodge, 31).

2:4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

2:5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Paul's mode of preaching is described first negatively and then positively. He did not preach with persuasive words but with the power of the Spirit. (Spirit and power occur together often and may be a hendiadys – one concept expressed by the means of two words - Barrett, 66; Fee, 95).

The reason Paul preached in this way was so that the message that was received would not be founded upon man-made wisdom but upon the power of God. Paul could have emphasized the gospel's superiority to the surrounding religions or its divine origin as evidenced by miracles. He might have demonstrated the foolishness of idolatry or the historicity of Christ. Although this may have resulted in *rational faith*, rational faith is not *saving faith*. "The true foundation of faith, or rather, the foundation of true faith, is the power of God" (Hodge, 32). A faith that rests upon a human or experiential base will be at the mercy of superior logic or more powerful experiences and would be completely insecure (Barrett, 66). The transformation of a heart is not the work of the preacher or his delivery, but of the Spirit. It is a demonstration of power.

From this we learn the proper way to communicate the gospel. Although it may be necessary to say what we can in order to remove obstacles, our goal is to present the truth of Jesus and His crucifixion. Secondly, the proper state of mind is not self-confidence, but confidence in God. Thirdly, the success of the gospel is not dependent upon the preacher but the Spirit. Lastly, the foundation of saving faith is not reason that speaks to the mind, but conviction of the heart produced by the power of God (Hodge, 32-33).

God's wisdom – revealed by His Spirit (2:6-16)

Up to this point, Paul has been pretty hard on wisdom since the wisdom that the Corinthians wanted placed Paul and the gospel in a less favorable light (Fee, 98). But Paul does not look down on all wisdom, for God has acted in His wisdom and has made Christ wisdom to us. This, however, cannot be perceived by those who are pursuing human wisdom as the Corinthians were.

The Corinthians objected to Paul's preaching because he did not attempt to give any rational or philosophical proof behind the doctrines he propounded. He answered these objections by saying that the doctrines he taught did not come from his own reason or the wisdom of men, but were matters of divine revelation; they were simply what God declared to be true; Paul was a mere organ of the Spirit of God.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7-13, the apostle sets forth this whole subject in the clearest and most concise manner. The things he taught, which he calls "the wisdom of God" or "the things of the Spirit," had never entered into the mind of man. God had revealed those truths to him by His Spirit; for the Spirit is the only competent source of such knowledge. Verse 11 states, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." Paul could not know the thoughts

of God; the Holy Spirit had to be the source of his knowledge and this was the ground on which the doctrines he taught were to be received.

In 2:6-16 Paul demolishes the Corinthians' boasting and shows that the gospel is wisdom but it is wisdom reserved for those who have the Spirit of God. Because they had the Spirit and the mind of Christ, they should have been able to see the wisdom of the gospel. The problem was not that Paul and his message were too simplistic or childish but that the Corinthians were not spiritually minded. The net result was that they viewed the simple message of the cross as milk and sought deeper truth via the world's wisdom.

This then is the ground on which the sacred writer rested his claims. He was the mere organ of God. He was His messenger. Those who heard him, heard God; and those who refused to hear him, refused to hear God.

Paul uses the Corinthians' language but fills in the content of wisdom with his own words to correct their erroneous thinking. Paul's view of wisdom differs radically from theirs. The Corinthians viewed eloquence, logic, and oratory skills as expressions of wisdom (1:19-24); Paul found wisdom in the Spirit of God.

Paul's argument in these verses is divided into three parts:

(1) In 2:6-10a God's wisdom is described as being a mystery, for it is disclosed to believers but is hidden from the world.

(2) In 2:10b – 13 Paul tells us *how* God gave us wisdom but concealed it from the world. Namely, the world has no mechanism to gather God's wisdom but we have the Spirit who knows the mind of God and has revealed the wisdom of God to us.

(3) 2:13-16 reaffirms these points by showing that all people are either natural or spiritual. Natural people are incapable of assessing spiritual things, so spiritual truth and spiritual people cannot be understood by them.

2:6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;

Some have taken verse 6 to mean that Paul has hidden spiritual wisdom beyond the message of the cross that he is keeping from the church because they are too immature to receive it. However, both the preceding verses and the remainder of this paragraph demonstrate that this is not the case.

1) First, Paul has already described the content of wisdom as Christ crucified (1:23-24, 30; 2:2), not some deeper truth beyond this. There is no reason for deviating from this here. (Besides, if he was talking about higher doctrines, what are they? Nobody knows.)

2) Paul *has been* contrasting the wisdom of the believing with the unbelieving, not different levels of wisdom in the church. Those who viewed the gospel as foolishness were unbelievers, not immature Christians. The same contrast continues. The wisdom of the mature

is contrasted with the wisdom of this age and the rulers of this age who crucified Christ. They are called “natural men” (unsaved men).

3) Lastly, it is clear that Paul is speaking to the whole church not just a group within it, since the wisdom he is referring to is called “our glory” (2:7). It is wisdom “for those who love Him” (2:9). It is revealed “to us” (2:10) “who have received the Spirit of God” (2:12).

Thus, the mature are those who have a mature perspective of wisdom and are able to perceive the wisdom of God found in the gospel.

In other words, Paul’s point is not that there are two kinds of believers in the church: a mature group who can understand deep things and the immature group who cannot. Rather, he wants them all to realize that understanding the wisdom of the cross is typical of the mature (the spiritual, the believer). This maturity is a possession of all believers. The problem with the church in Corinth is that they have come to love human wisdom more than the wisdom of God. Though they were mature (saved), they were acting like babes!

The work of the Spirit marks a turning point that distinguishes the ages. Those of this age belong to an era that is perishing. They do not have the Spirit and cannot understand God’s wisdom. They are not destined to glory (2:7) for they have failed to see the wisdom of God (the gospel) altogether. Those who crucified Christ are within this group (2:8). Yet their wisdom is the wisdom that the Corinthians gave deference to in 1:20 and 26 (Fee, 104).

Those who have the Spirit belong to the new age that God is bringing in. They can understand the wisdom of God in the gospel because the Spirit has revealed it to them. “This is why Paul comes down so hard on his Corinthian friends. They do have the Spirit, they are part of the new age that God is ushering in, but their present conduct and stance toward wisdom betray them” (Fee, 100). They are acting like unbelievers who are not spiritually enlightened. Paul’s goal is to get them to refocus and start acting like the spiritual people they are.

2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

2:8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

In verse 6 Paul explained that God’s wisdom was *not* of this age, nor of the rulers of this age. Here he states what it *is*.

God’s wisdom is distinct from the wisdom of the world in 4 ways:

1) God’s wisdom is a mystery – to Paul, a mystery is not a secret saying that is only given to the initiated few. It is a truth that in previous generations was hidden from men but has now been revealed in history through Christ and made understandable through the Holy Spirit (Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19).

2) God's wisdom is hidden - salvation through the crucified Messiah, though prophesied, cannot be found through human effort.

3) God's wisdom has destined us for glory before time began (2:7b). This is where Paul begins to clarify "wisdom" and identify the "mature."

Wisdom in this context is still the wisdom of the gospel, for it is a wisdom that the rulers of this age didn't recognize. If they had, they would not have crucified Christ. The mature are those whom God predetermined to respond to His message.

What God had determined beforehand is being worked out in this age, to our glory (2:7). Earlier, Paul said that God had saved the "nobodies" to shame the wise (1:28). He now reveals that we are the ones who will receive glory, for we will share in the glory of Christ.

4) God's wisdom cannot be understood by the rulers of this age. This is because it is hidden in God and cannot be found apart from the Spirit (2:10). The very ones who thought that they were wise were those who crucified Christ, though ironically, they were fulfilling the predetermined plan of God. In their ignorance, they brought the wisdom of God to fruition.

NOTE: "The Lord of glory" is a title for God (cf. Psa. 24:10; Acts 7:2; Ja. 2:1; Eph. 1:17). This leads us to an important observation in Scripture; the person of Christ can be designated either by titles that refer to His divine nature or to His humanity (cf. Acts 20:28). Although we do not normally say that God died on the cross, here, Jesus, the Lord of glory, did.

2:9 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."

Paul concludes this portion of his argument by quoting Scripture (Isa. 64:4; 65:16). Many people have memorized 1 Corinthians 2:9 but grossly misapply it. This is not referring to God revealing hidden mysteries any more than 2:6 is. When he writes of "things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man" he is referring to the spiritual realities in this life which cannot be seen by the unbelieving mind. This is made clear by the words of the following verse: "But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:10; Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, "Total Inability").

Paul's point is the same as that in verses 6-8; he preached a gospel that was undiscoverable by human wisdom. It cannot be found through the senses (through the eye or the ear) nor does it enter the heart of man through personal experience, observation, or reason. It only comes to those who have been prepared by God to believe.

Paul says that the wisdom found in the gospel was "prepared for those who love Him." Verses 10–13 tell us how God reveals the truth of the gospel to those for whom the gospel was prepared and yet keeps it hidden from others.

2:10a For to us God revealed them through the Spirit;

Though God's wisdom does not enter the heart of man by human effort, those for whom the gospel was prepared for (the elect) understand it. This is possible because the believer has the Holy Spirit and the Spirit reveals the gospel to them.

2:10b to 13 describe how this process of revealing the wisdom of God in the gospel happens.

2:10b for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Communication of God's wisdom is possible since the Spirit searches the depths of God (cf. Ro. 11:33). [This passage describes the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He is not a force, but He has a mind and can "search."]

"Perhaps this sentence, too, has a tinge of irony. They [*the Corinthians*] considered Paul's preaching to be "milk"; on the contrary, he replies, redemption through the cross comes from the profound depths of God's own wisdom, which His Spirit, given to those who love Him, has searched out and revealed to us" (Fee, 111).

This work of the Spirit in which He reveals to believers the depths of God's wisdom is described by way of analogy in verse 11.

2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Just as only the spirit of man knows what the person is thinking, only the Spirit of God knows what is in God's mind. We cannot know what is in the mind of God unless His Spirit communicates to us what He knows. The Spirit becomes the link between God's wisdom and man's understanding.

2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,

Verses 12 and 13 are at the center of Paul's thought. Those who are of the world only have the spirit of the world and thus, do not have access to the hidden things of God. But the "mature" (2:6) have the Spirit of God and therefore, know the mind of God.

The Corinthians thought that wisdom came from the human mind, but true wisdom (wisdom of God's salvation) comes from the Holy Spirit who reveals the mind of God. This is the wisdom that Paul had preached to the people in Corinth. Because those in Corinth have the Holy Spirit (as evidenced by their reception of the gospel), they should stop thinking like the world and instead, embrace the lifestyle that revolves around the cross.

Verse 12b gives the reason the Spirit was given to us; He was given “so that we might know the things freely given to us by God.” The “things” he is talking about no doubt go back to verse 9 - namely, the things of salvation that God has prepared for those who love Him.

2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Verse 13 returns to the message Paul preached to those in Corinth. Paul spoke the gospel that was freely given to him by God (2:12, 1:16, 17). The words used by Paul to communicate the message of salvation did not come from the world or his own mind (**not in words taught by human wisdom**); it was a message of wisdom taught by the Spirit (**but in those taught by the Spirit**). It combined spiritual thoughts (given to him by the Spirit) with words appropriate to relay the same spiritual truth to man.

All believers have received the Spirit who enables them to understand God’s wisdom.

NOTE: The Spirit has been a steady theme:

- The power of the Spirit was at the heart of Paul’s preaching (1:4, 5, 13).
- The Spirit brought understanding to those in Corinth (1:4, 5, 12) and led them to salvation (1:6-13).
- The gospel was not preached “in words taught by human wisdom” but in words that come from the Spirit (spiritual words).

2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Although the gospel is communicated in human language, it does not register with certain people. Verse 14 tells us why: The natural man (i.e. the man under the sole influence of his human nature) thinks that the gospel is foolishness; he cannot understand it and therefore he does not accept it.

The natural man belongs to the world. Left to his own experiences and mental capabilities, he is helpless to discover things hidden in God. In order to understand the mind of God and His wisdom, he needs God to reveal it to him. Without the Spirit, that link is missing. As a result, the beauty of the gospel cannot be seen. It is not simply that he *does* not see it or that he *will* not see it, but that he *cannot* see it. “The difficulty is not merely with his will but with his whole inward state” (Hodge, 44).

Spiritual thoughts are only discernible when the Spirit reveals them. Man cannot make a proper judgment (appraisal) about God when he has no mechanism to do so.

Hodge in his Systematic Theology says,

“The natural man is distinguished from the spiritual man. The latter is one in whom the Holy Spirit is the principle of life and activity, or, who is under the control of the Spirit, the former is one who is under the control of his own fallen nature, in whom there is no principle of life and action but what belongs to him as a fallen creature. Of such a man the Apostle asserts, first, that he does not receive the things of the Spirit, that is, the truths which the Spirit has revealed; secondly, that they are foolishness to him; thirdly, that he cannot know them; and fourthly, that the reason of this inability is the want of spiritual discernment, that is, of that apprehension of the nature and truth of divine things which is due to the inward teaching or illumination of the Holy Ghost. This passage therefore not only asserts the fact of the sinner’s inability, but teaches the ground or source of it. It is no mere aversion or disinclination, but the want of true knowledge. No man can see the beauty of a work of art without esthetic discernment; and no man, according to the Apostle, can see the truth and beauty of spiritual things without spiritual discernment. Such is the constant representation of Scripture. Men are everywhere spoken of and regarded not only as guilty and polluted, but also as helpless” (Systematic Theology, Vol 2, 268-269).

**2:15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man.
2:16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.**

Verses 15 and 16 bring the discussion that began in 1:17 to a close and give the application as to why Christians are not to quarrel at the same time.

The spiritual man (the Christian) is able to appraise all things in contrast to the natural man (the unbeliever) who has no ability to discern spiritual truth (2:14). “Such a statement of course cannot be wrestled from its context. It is “the Spirit who searches all things, even the depths of God” (v.10); therefore, the person who has the Spirit can discern God’s ways. Not necessarily all things of course, but all things that pertain to the work of salvation, matters formerly hidden in God but now revealed through the Spirit” (Fee, 118).

Because the person who lacks the Spirit cannot discern what God is doing, he cannot discern what is happening in the life and mind of the person who has the Spirit either. The spiritual person is able to appraise (discern) spiritual truth (**he who is spiritual appraises all things**), but is not able to be apprised by others who do not have the Spirit (**yet he himself is appraised by no man**). “. . . this simply means that the person who belongs to this age is not in a position to judge as ‘foolish’ the person who belongs to the age to come” (Fee, 118). However, a person who has the Spirit is able to know both spiritual truth and the things the natural man knows.

The Corinthians thought that they were spiritual, but their actions have proven that they thought more like natural men. In that condition they were not able to make judgments about

Paul (Fee, 118-119). Paul, however, had the mind of Christ which put him in the position to evaluate them.

Verse 16 quotes Isaiah 40:13 and is the Scriptural support for Paul's assertions. "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" has a double intent:

- (1) No one can know God's mind unless it is revealed.
- (2) How can the church pass judgment on Paul when they are so worldly-minded? How can they accuse Paul of being simplistic by bypassing the wisdom of God revealed in the cross?

The Corinthians shouldn't be thinking about wisdom as they were for believers have the mind of Christ. "Mind" is more than the instrument of thought; it is the mode of thought, the mindset (Thiselton, 275). The believer has the mind of Christ revealed by the Spirit to him.

CONCLUSION:

Paul began by saying that he had brought to the church a message of wisdom – God's wisdom found in the gospel. He possessed this wisdom because he had received the Spirit. The Spirit understands the things of God and passed them to Paul as well as to every believer. Since Paul and the believers in Corinth both have the Spirit, they should also possess the same mind. But they don't. Evidently, their love for human wisdom moved them away from Christ, creating division in the church.

This paragraph has endured a most unfortunate history of application in the church. Paul's own point has almost been totally lost in favor of an interpretation nearly 180 degrees in the opposite of his intent. Almost every form of elitism, "deeper life" movement, and "second blessing" doctrine has appealed to this text. To receive the Spirit according to their special expression paves the way for people to know "deeper truths" about God. One special brand of this elitism surfaces among some who have pushed the possibilities of "faith" to the extreme, and regularly make a "special revelation" from the Spirit their final court of appeal. Other "lesser" brothers and sisters are simply living below their full privileges in Christ. Indeed some advocates of this form of spirituality bid fair to repeat the Corinthian error in its totality. What is painful about so much of this is not simply the improper use of the passage, but that so often it is accompanied by the toning down of the message of the cross. In fact one is hard-pressed to hear the content of "God's wisdom" ever expounded as the paradigm for true Christian living. . . Being spiritual does not lead to elitism; it leads to a deeper understanding of God's profound mystery – redemption through a crucified Messiah (Fee, 120).