

The Wisdom of This World Contrasted with the Wisdom of God

1 Corinthians 2

1 Corinthians 2: *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ."*

Background Notes

In the second half of 1 Corinthians 1 Paul dealt with the root of the problem that was causing disunity, division and factions in the Corinthian church. The Corinthian Christians did not properly understand the message of the cross and the ways of God. There is no place for the glory of man in the cross of Christ! In the cross of Christ, the wisdom and cleverness and might of man are all judged and condemned by God. The wisdom and might of man does not lead him to know God. These things lead him to reject God.

The Corinthian believers needed this teaching because they tended to put too much emphasis on the wisdom of man and the glory of man - what many Christians do today. The Corinthians had to be taught that God's normal method is to use what man calls weak and foolish and small for His glory. The way of God is to bring down the pride of man, and to reduce what man considers to be great and powerful and clever.

In chapter 2 Paul explained that this is why he came to Corinth the way he did. He didn't try to impress the people of Corinth with his knowledge or intellectual language, even though he certainly could have. Paul had a great mind and a top-notch education to go along with it. Furthermore, just before Paul first came to Corinth, he had been in Athens presenting the truth to the philosophers and great thinkers of the day. But when Paul came to Corinth, he was determined to present **God's truth** in **God's way** - not with impressive eloquence and worldly wisdom, but in a simple straightforward humble presentation, depending totally on the Holy Spirit and the power of God for results.

As it was then, so it should be today. The simple straightforward preaching of the cross is what the unbeliever needs to hear, not a clever, eloquent, impressive speech that only brings glory to the speaker. After a sermon, the audience should not say, "Wasn't he good?" - but rather, "**Isn't God great!**"

Doctrinal Points

1. There is the "wisdom of this world" and the "wisdom of God."

Verses 6-13 - *"However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'*

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

God is not against all wisdom. But God is against the wisdom *of this world* because the world, through its wisdom, does not know God and does not come to God. *"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1:21)*

There is another wisdom, a wisdom that is not man's wisdom - not even the greatest of men - and not of this present age. It is not the wisdom of this world. It is the wisdom of God. In James 3, the wisdom of this world is referred to as earthly, sensual, and demonic (James 3:15), but the wisdom of God is referred to as the wisdom from above, and is **pure and peaceable** (James 3:17).

The wisdom of God involves God's plan and purpose for mankind and the world. This plan and purpose is centered and focused in Jesus Christ. We can know and have this wisdom when we come to Christ, and as we mature in Him. Verse

6: *“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”* Until the coming of Christ, this wisdom was hidden; it was not fully available. That’s why it’s referred to as a “mystery”: *“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory”* (v7). A biblical mystery is truth that was hidden in Old Testament times, but has now been revealed with the coming of Christ.

Unbelievers don’t understand the plan and purpose of our all-wise God. Unbelievers don’t understand that the wisdom of God and God’s program for the world is centered on Christ, and that *“in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:3). If unbelievers understood all this, they would not have crucified Christ, who is the Lord of glory: *“Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”*(v8). Unbelievers and the rulers of this age don’t understand the wisdom of God, but Christians do. Christians understand because God has revealed His sovereign plans and purposes in Christ in His Word, and He has given us His Holy Spirit to understand His Word.

And we don’t have to wait until we get to heaven to begin to appreciate all the blessings that are ours as part of God’s plans and purposes! Verse 9 is usually applied to the believer’s inheritance in heaven: *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”* Notice that verse 12 emphasizes that even now, at the present time, we can enjoy the blessings of our inheritance as the Holy Spirit unfolds to us these truths that have been revealed: *“Now we have received... the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*

Are you experiencing and enjoying now the truth that you are part of the body of Christ forever? This is an example of one of the great truths that were hidden in the Old Testament, but are now fully revealed in the New Testament for us to experience and enjoy forever.

Notice how the processes of revelation, inspiration, and illumination by the Holy Spirit are all covered in these verses. And notice how verbal inspiration is taught in verse 13, *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”* The Holy Spirit has communicated spiritual truth - but not just in spiritual thoughts. Even the very words of the original documents are inspired. This is all part of the wisdom of God. There is both the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God.

2. There is both the “natural man” and the “spiritual man.”

Verses 14-16: *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself*

is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

Who’s the “natural man: of verse 14? The natural man is the unbeliever. Unbelievers do not understand the truth that God has revealed. In fact, the things of God are foolishness to unbelievers. The idea that there is a God who created the world and created life; and the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was the eternal Son of God; and the idea that the death of Jesus on a Roman cross atoned for the sin of the world; and the idea that when you believe this you have your sins forever and you will go to heaven and live forever - all of this sounds like foolishness to the unbeliever!

The very fact that you believe these things is evidence that you’re in the other category of mankind, the “spiritual man.” The spiritual man is the mature believer who is led and taught by the Holy Spirit. Verse 15 indicates that the spiritual believer thinks properly -and the world can’t figure this out. In fact, to the unbeliever the spiritual believer is an enigma.

Has an unbeliever said to you, “What makes you tick?” or “What makes you different?” The answer to what makes a Christian different is found in verse 16: we have the mind of Christ, and the unbelieving world doesn’t. The natural man does not instruct God (as Paul quotes from Isaiah 40:13), but rather the Lord instructs the spiritual man. Thus the spiritual man has the mind of Christ. There is both the natural man and the spiritual man.

Practical Application

Don’t say “It’s too deep for me!”

Did you ever hear a Christian say that? In other words, “I’m saved. I’m on my way to heaven. I know the basics. That’s all I need. I just can’t understand things like the Minor Prophets and the Book of Revelation and all those heavy teachings of Scripture. It’s just too *deep* for me!”

Well, if you’re in that category, let me remind you of 1 Corinthians 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 that have been freely given to us by God.”* If you’re a believer, you have the Holy Spirit. One reason the Holy Spirit has been given is that we might receive - so that we can **know** and **understand** -*“the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*

Yes, in order to know the things of God we must get into the Word - and meditate on the Word - and study the Word. But God didn’t give His Word to hide the truth from us, but to reveal His truth to us. So don’t say “It’s too deep for me!”