

1 Corinthians 02 - Illumination Comes from the Spirit; Natural Man vs Spiritual Man

II. Conditions reported to Paul (1 Cor 1:10—6:20)

(1) By Chloe's household: divisions (1:10—4:21)

(B) The gospel contrasted with human wisdom (1:18—2:16)

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(i) Those who receive God's wisdom versus those who do not (2:6-10a)

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1 Corinthians 2

(c) Paul's lack of reliance on human wisdom (2:1-5)

1 And **when I came to you**, brothers *and sisters*, I did not come as *someonesuperior in speaking ability* or **wisdom**, as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.

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.

1 When I came to you, brothers, I didn't come and tell you about God's secret with rhetorical language or wisdom.

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

- Paul reminds the Corinthians that he came to them with raw preaching of Christ and Him crucified in order to ensure that their faith rested in the power of God, not human wisdom

- "...when I came to you" - Paul visited Corinth on his 2nd missionary journey (Cf. Acts 18:1-18a); he stayed there for 18 months and worked as a tentmaker

- "...superior in speaking ability" - refers to the oratorical eloquence of the sophists, who the Corinthians tried to emulate

— Paul was certainly capable of reasoning and debating persuasively, but he didn't use that approach in preaching the gospel. He made a conscious decision ("I determined," v2) to put the emphasis on Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

- "...wisdom" - *sophia*, man's attempts to explain reality holistically

— Both the superior speaking ability and human wisdom were what Corinthian men valued at that time

— The reason why Paul did not come to them with these things is that doing so would have convinced them to have faith on the basis of human wisdom, which is a faulty foundation

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

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

2 For while I was with you I resolved to know nothing except Jesus the Messiah, and him crucified.

2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

- "...Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" - Paul excluded everything but this great central truth (Cf. Gal 3:1)

— "and Him crucified" - doesn't mean Paul proclaimed nothing about Christ except the cross; it means that the humiliation of the cross did not prevent Paul from proclaiming Christ

— With this approach, Paul wasn't catering to what his audience wanted (Cf. 1:22), but he didn't seem to care. He was going to preach Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, and forget about the soaring oratory and human wisdom the Corinthians wanted.

— Paul avoided artificial communication that won accolades for the speaker but distracted from the message

- Some teach that this phrase means that Paul limited his message to telling Jesus stories and preaching the gospel. They argue that Paul had tried to philosophize at Athens, but because of his failure, when he went to Corinth he determined never to do that again.

However, Paul did not fail at Athens. Some joined and believed (Cf. Acts 17:34).

— After people heard Paul, they did not say, "What a wonderful preacher!" Instead, they said, "What a wonderful Savior!"

3 I also was with you in weakness and fear, and in great trembling,

3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

3 It was in weakness, fear, and great trembling that I came to you.

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

- There are a couple of reasons why Paul may have been "weak...fearful...in great trembling" while he was in Corinth:

- He sensed his personal inadequacy in the face of the spiritual needs that he faced in Corinth. Jesus Himself spoke with Paul and encouraged him to not fear and persevere in what He had called him to do (Cf. Acts 18:9-10).
- He may have been ill while he was in Corinth (Cf. 2 Cor 12:7)

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

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

4 My message and my preaching were not accompanied by clever, wise words, but by a display of the Spirit's power,

4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

- "...persuasive words of wisdom" - Paul is not rejecting persuasive preaching (Cf. his sermon before Agrippa in Acts 26 is a remarkable example). He is rejecting any reliance on a preacher's ability to persuade with human wisdom (Cf. 2 Cor 5:11).

- Paul did not design his message or delivery to impress his hearers with his eloquence or wisdom; instead, he emphasized a simple message

- "...demonstration" - *apodeixis*, making manifest; showing proof

- Paul's preaching was a demonstration, not a performance. Conviction came as a result of the Holy Spirit's power, not the cleverness of his words.

- Paul knew it was the preacher's job to preach the word, and it was the Spirit's job to "demonstrate." This is why Paul's preaching to the Corinthians may not have been impressive or persuasive on a human level, but on a spiritual level it had "power."

- Paul's personal defects had afforded the most convincing demonstration of the power of the Spirit (2 Cor 12:9, linking power with the Spirit; Cf. Rom 15:13; 1 Thess 1:5; and with the gospel, Rom 1:16).

- "...the Spirit" - conviction came as a result of the Holy Spirit's power, not the "wisdom" of the preacher; conviction never comes as a result of persuasive arguments

- As evidence of the power of God, the Spirit works through the message preached in order to convict people

- With the mention of the Spirit here, Paul begins to transition his focus to the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit

- Believers have a unique advantage in that the Spirit has direct access to the things of God and indwells believers to illuminate them with knowledge that is unattainable by human means

- The Corinthians were not taking advantage of this work of the Spirit, hence they were still carnal (Cf. 3:1-3). Paul's goal is to re-focus their view of spirituality so that they could grow.

It is possible for arguments to be logically irrefutable, yet totally unconvincing.

5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of mankind, but on the power of God.

- 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.
- 5 so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on God's power.
- 5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.
- The reason Paul approached the Corinthians in this manner was so that those who came to Christ in faith would recognize that their faith rested on a supernatural rather than a natural foundation
 - That supernatural foundation is the illumination of the Holy Spirit, by the power of God
 - Faith that depends upon clever reasoning can be demolished by a more acute argument. Faith produced by the power of God can never be overthrown.
 - Preaching strategies centered around human wisdom—emotion, entertainment, or personality—may yield a *response*, but not a *result*. Paul is saying that whatever you draw people *with* is what you draw them *to*.
 - The wisdom of Christ, illuminated out of His Word of His Spirit, was in total opposition to the worldly wisdom so beloved in Corinth and prevalent in their church

God's Spirit Reveals Everything

Literary context and continuity of the argument are important to understanding this passage. If these are not employed, Paul seems to be advocating that Christianity is a private religion for the spiritual elite.

Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit's "power" (v4-5) led him to elaborate on the Spirit's ministry in enlightening the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. The Corinthians needed to view ministry differently. The key to this change would be the Holy Spirit's illumination of their thinking. People who are pursuing true wisdom (*sophia*) cannot perceive it except as the Holy Spirit enlightens them.

There are three overlapping contrasts in this passage:

1. Those who receive God's wisdom and those who don't (v6-10a)
2. The Spirit of God with the spirit of the world (v10b-13)
3. The "natural" person and the "spiritual" person (v14-16)

(d) Illumination by the Holy Spirit (2:6-16)

(i) Those who receive God's wisdom versus those who do not (2:6-10a)

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**;

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;

6 However, when we are among mature people, we do speak a message of wisdom, but not the wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this world, who are passing off the scene.

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

- "...those who are mature" - the wisdom that Paul spoke of was different than human wisdom, and was for those who are spiritually mature

- A mature believer in Paul's eyes was someone who was advanced in understanding; immature Christians don't fully understand the depths of the gospel

- Paul also uses "mature" (*teleios*) to describe mature believers in 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15

- Paul may also be using this ironically, since the Corinthians thought they were mature, but in 3:1-3 Paul classifies the Christians in Corinth as immature and carnal

- "...rulers of this age" - the "influencers" of Corinth, who were in the spotlight and control public opinion as they have received the spirit of this world (Cf. v12), animated by demons and dispensed to them (Cf. Eph 2:2)

- "...passing away" - they come onto the stage for awhile, then to pass off of the stage, and their opinions go with them. Paul says these "influencers" are only temporary.

The deep things of God require a type of "wisdom" that is different from secular wisdom ("not of this age"). In this present age between the two advents, those who control the climate of public opinion dominate secular wisdom. These "rulers" are those individuals who set the standard for what unbelieving people, who disregard God's revelation, consider as true (Cf. 1:20,26), particularly those who were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion (v8). However, these people are on the way out ("passing away"), because the popular perception of what is true changes, and because Christ will end their rule eventually (15:24-25; Col 2:15).

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

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

7 Instead, we speak about God's wisdom in a hidden secret, which God destined before the world began for our glory.

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

- "...we speak God's wisdom in a mystery" - just because Paul did not cater to the Corinthians' love for human wisdom does not mean that his message had no wisdom

- Paul says there is a vast wealth of wisdom sealed off from everyone except the believer (a "mystery")

— The "wisdom" Paul speaks of is not some hidden wisdom that God had not previously revealed, or some revelation in addition to the gospel. It was the gospel message about Christ crucified. The plan of salvation that involves the message of the cross is the wisdom of God.

— It was a "mystery" because the message was unknown before Christ came. The cross was a further unfolding of God's plan and purpose beyond what He had revealed and what people had previously known in OT times. Even Peter tried to stop Jesus' crucifixion when he heard of it (Cf. Matt 16:21-23).

- "...predestined before the ages" - the gospel was not an afterthought; it was "predestined" by God as part of His plan before time began (Cf. 1 Peter 1:19-20)

— "predestined" - *proorizō*, to predetermine or decide beforehand; aorist tense describes a definitive past act that has been completed

— Paul expounded on the fact that God "predestined" this mystery from before creation in Eph 3:2-12. The Ephesian church was more mature and better able to understand this revelation than the Corinthian congregation

- "...our glory" - the goal of this "secret" plan pre-planned by God: "our glory" which is our resurrection (glorification) unto Christ-likeness (1 John 3:2)

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**;

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;

8 None of the rulers of this world understood it, because if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- "...rulers of this age" - the same intellectual trendsetters ("influencers") Paul mentioned in v6

— Rulers of this age (the inter-advent period, or Church Age; the Times of the Gentiles) did not understand the wisdom of Christ and Him crucified (Acts 3:17-18; 4:25-28); Jesus Himself says so (Luke 23:34)

- "...if they had understood it" - they acted in ignorance (Cf. Ps 2:1-2; Acts 3:17-18; 4:35-36)

- "...Lord of glory" - Paul is referring to Christ's supreme position as glorified in resurrection and ties it to our future glorification (Cf. v7)

9 but just as it is written: "THINGS WHICH **EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD**, AND *WHICH* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HUMAN HEART, **ALL THAT GOD HAS**

PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

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."

9 But as it is written, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him."

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

- Quoted from Is 64:4 (Cf. 65:17)...the context is Isaiah asking God to come down and make Himself known to the nations

— Paul applies it to show that the wisdom of Christ and Him crucified can only be known by revelation

— This OT quote summarizes Paul's point: there are many things we can know by revelation; the more God reveals, the more clearly we see that he has designed His plans for humanity *for our blessing*.

- "...EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD" - the eyes and ears are the normal means of human learning, but one thing that is not known through these means is the wisdom of the cross

- "...ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" - this revelation, unavailable through human eyes and ears, is something that God prepared specifically for those who love Him

— Paul's thought is that there is no method of apprehension open to man (eyes, ears, or understanding) which can give him any idea of the wonderful things that God has made ready for *them that love him*.

— "ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED" - does not refer to the unknown glories of heaven, as is commonly taught; it refers to the way of salvation which God has prepared by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see note on "revealed" in v10)

Many people read this and think it is talking about heaven, but watch the context of the verses following (v10-16)...the context here is describing Bible study available to believers after the completed canon.

(ii) The Spirit of God versus the spirit of the world (2:10b-13)

10 For to us God **revealed them through the Spirit**; for the Spirit **searches** all things, even the **depths** of God.

10 For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

10 But God has revealed those things to us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

- "...revealed" - *apokalyptō*, aorist (past) tense; the wonderful things about salvation that God has prepared "for those who love Him" (v9) are not knowable by only a select group of Christians. Any and every believer ("us") can and should understand and appreciate them.

— The aorist (past) tense of *apokalyptō* confirms the interpretation that "ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" (v9) is not the things God has prepared for us in heaven (since these glories "have been revealed," past tense), but rather the way of salvation that God has prepared for us through His Son (see note on v9).

- "...them" - from v9, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, which is the way of salvation through Jesus Christ

- "...through the Spirit" - the means that God uses to reveal the wisdom of the cross to us, so that we can understand, is through (by means of) the Holy Spirit

— Here, Paul is speaking of the Spirit's ministry of illumination of the believer, to help believers understand spiritual truth, specifically soteriology. This is the clearest description of the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit in all of Scripture.

— The Spirit also uses those with the gift of teaching (1 Cor 12:29; Eph 4:11) to teach believers, and His ministry of anointing (1 John 2:27) to confirm what is taught

— This knowledge is available to all believers because all believers have the Spirit's indwelling presence (Rom 8:9)

- The Corinthians were not availing themselves of this knowledge because they valued the clever oratory of the sophists more than apprehending the wisdom of Christ and Him crucified, which could only be accessed by the Spirit

- "...searches" - *eraunaō*, continually examines

— The Spirit's knowledge of God penetrates God entirely; this is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit is omniscient

- "...depths" - after 2000 years, there are still depths of Christ and Him crucified that we absolutely no idea of

— Fortunately, the Spirit "searches" these depths, and His illuminating ministry is the key to unlocking them

11 **For** who among people knows the *thoughts* of a person except the spirit of the person that is in him? So also the *thoughts* of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God.

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.

11 Is there anyone who can understand his own thoughts except his own inner spirit? In the same way, no one can know the thoughts of God except God's Spirit.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

- "For" - indicates the logical reason for the Spirit's necessity in knowing the depths of God
- Just as no human can know the thoughts of another human, no one can know the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God

12 Now **we** have not received **the spirit of the world**, but the Spirit who is from God, **so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.**

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

12 Now, we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we can understand the things that were freely given to us by God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

- All believers receive the indwelling Holy Spirit at the time of faith (Cf. 12:13; Rom 8:9)

— The Spirit helps us understand (know) the mind (thoughts) of God, and the things God has "freely given to us"

— This Spirit is vastly different from the "spirit of the world"; unbelievers cannot understand (know) the things of God like believers can because they have no one to help them perceive supernatural things

- "...we" - all believers (emphatic in Greek)

- "...the spirit of the world" - the thinking and worldview of the world system, controlled by Satan (Eph 2:2)

- "...so that we may know" - so that we can be taught by His Spirit about the wisdom of God, which centers on the depths of Christ and Him crucified

— This wisdom is "freely given" to every believer who avails themselves of the teaching ministry of the Spirit. The Corinthian believers were not availing themselves of this gift.

- "...things freely given to us by God" - (at least) 34 things that God has given every believer as part of their "grace package" (Cf. notes on Eph 1:3)

13 **We also speak these things**, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, **combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.**

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*.

13 We don't speak about these things with words taught us by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual things to spiritual people.

13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

- "We also speak these things" - in case the Corinthians (and us) were confused by what this wisdom of God given to us actually is, Paul says...it's what I'm preaching!

— Having been taught by the Spirit (v6-7), Paul now spoke these things to other believers

— When he taught these things he learned from the Spirit, he did not use "words taught by human wisdom" (he didn't use the vocabulary that the world uses to express its viewpoint), but rather he used the words "taught by the Spirit"

- "...combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*" - a better translation may be:

"combining spiritual ideas with spiritual words." Spiritual words are used to convey spiritual thoughts.

— We can't simply adopt the world's words to express divine truths. The words given to us in Scripture are the words that the Spirit has taught us to use to convey spiritual truth.

— Thus, it is out of step with the Spirit, the Author of Scripture, to devise a specialized vocabulary to teach spiritual truths outside what the Spirit has given us in Scripture

— This warning was critical for Paul to get across to the Corinthians because they were so concerned with clever speech. The message is that there is a proper way to convey spiritual ideas and it is through the use of spiritual words (the words of Scripture).

(iii) The natural man versus the spiritual man (2:14-16)

14 But a **natural person** 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 discerned.

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.

14 A person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the things of God's Spirit, for they are nonsense to him. He can't understand them because they are spiritually evaluated.

14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- "...natural person" - any person who does not possess the Holy Spirit; an unbeliever. Paul uses the term "natural" because they are spiritually dead, separated from God.

— The natural man has no supernatural Spirit indwelling him, thus his viewpoints and ideas are exclusively the natural, human kind. He cannot understand all that God has revealed because he does not possess the Spirit, who enables people to understand spiritual things.

— Unbelievers are unable to judge spiritually because they themselves are dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1) and without the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is required in order to understand spiritual things.

- "...accept" - *dechomai*, welcome; an unbeliever does not welcome the things of the Spirit because they appear as foolishness to him
- "...understand" - *ginōskō*, not the best translation of *ginōskō* here; the word has a wide range of meanings, but here it likely means that an unbeliever cannot *grasp the significance* of the things of the Spirit because to understand requires the Spirit's illumination
- An unbeliever is able to "understand" the Bible and the gospel at a basic level. However without the Spirit, they are unable to *grasp the significance* of the Bible or the gospel.

The gospel is a proposition. However, a person must attend to the things being taught (John 6:45) and the Spirit must convict him (John 16:8-11) in order for him to believe unto salvation (Rom 11:17). Paul is not addressing all these truths here. He is simply saying that if an unbeliever is left to himself, he considers the message of Christ and Him crucified to be foolish and he is not able to give it a sound spiritual appraisal.

- 15 But the one who is spiritual **discerns all things**, yet **he himself is discerned by no one**.
- 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.
- 15 The spiritual person evaluates everything but is subject to no one else's evaluation.
- 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.
- In contrast to the "natural man," the spiritual man is able to evaluate (make judgments) regarding spiritual things (Christ and Him crucified)
- In other words, a spiritual person has a discernment for spiritual truth that a "natural" person lacks, which affects his values and decisions
- This person has developed spiritual discernment by walking in the Spirit and knows the power and wisdom of God is wrapped up in Christ. His behavior reflects his outlook.
- "...discerns" - *anakinō*, appraise, examine, judge
- "...all things" - the source of wisdom is God (James 1:5) and His Word (Ps 119:105); they are spiritually discerned
- "...he himself is discerned by no one" - the way that natural men (unbelievers) evaluate him is not what ultimately matters; even a carnal believer will not understand a spiritually mature believer

16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE **MIND OF THE LORD**, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have **the mind of Christ**.

16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

16 For "Who has known the mind of the Lord so that he can advise him?" However, we have the mind of the Messiah.

16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ.

- Quoting Is 40:13...Paul uses this OT quote to explain why the evaluation of a spiritual man by an unbeliever (or carnal Christian) carries very little weight

- "...MIND OF THE LORD" - no one knows the mind of the Lord except the Spirit of God (Cf. v10), however believers are indwelt by that same Spirit, so each believer has the potential to know the mind of God to a degree

- The spiritual man has taken steps to know Him by spending time in His Word and being taught by the Spirit of God, thus he is in a position where the only evaluation that matters is the Lord's

- Isaiah marveled at the mind of God: he asks, "Who has known the mind of the Lord..." Certainly no one can, however mature believers can understand, to a much greater degree than unbelievers, because they have the Spirit of God indwelling and controlling them.

- Consequently, believers have the "mind of Christ"

- In Phil 2:5, Paul urged his readers to adopt the "mind (attitude) of Christ." Even though we possess the mind of Christ, we need to adopt it or use it to view life as He did. This is the mark of a mature believer.

- This does not mean that there is no room for evaluation by other believers. Paul elsewhere discussed the importance of church discipline (5:3-8), constructive criticism (11:17-18), and self evaluation (11:31).

- However, what natural men (unbelievers) and carnal believers think does not really matter

- "...the mind of Christ" - the worldview of Christ; a view of the world from God's perspective