

## IV. The Wisdom of the Trinity

October 16/18, 2012

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

**Aim:** To rely on the eternal, hidden wisdom of God – the gospel of Christ – revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets, instead of the temporary, fallen wisdom of this age.

### A. The Testimony of Paul (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Through no fault of his own Paul has fallen out of favor with some Corinthians. Unless he acts he will be unable to deal with important issues that have arisen, and which in fact are dealt with from chapter 5 onwards.

The Corinthian church was tangled in the nasty business of exalting one preacher over another. To counter this, Paul argued first that the nature of the gospel is such that there is nothing for man to glory in. Then he argued that the nature of the believer's experience is such that there is nothing for him to glory in. Now Paul says the nature of preaching is such that there is nothing for man to glory in. Saving power is not to be found in the preacher of the Word any more than it is in the hearer of the Word. So Paul says exalting one preacher over another constitutes a complete misunderstanding of what preaching is all about. Preaching is not intended to be something which glorifies man. What, then, is true preaching? According to Paul it consists of three elements: having the right message, the right method, and the right motive.

#### 1. Paul's Message (2:1-2)

##### a) *The Source (2:1)*

<sup>1</sup>*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.*

Paul's opening in this section shows that he is contrasting himself with another preacher or preachers within the Corinthian church. His opening words, literally 'I for my part' (*kagō*), are contrastive, 'as opposed to *him* for *his* part.'

Paul's message depended on God, both for its origin and content. He came as a commissioned messenger and the message had to be authenticated in the ambassador. However, Paul was totally unlike the traveling teachers of his day. They relied precisely upon the skills of rhetoric and philosophical argument in order to produce an impressive performance, develop popularity, and, no doubt, line their pockets. Paul deliberately chose to differentiate himself from these other teachers ('I decided,' v. 2).

Not only was Paul's message apparently a weak, insipid thing, and not only were most Corinthians socially insignificant, Paul himself had also come across to many as being an individual of little consequence. In brief, he is saying that, just as the church is composed mostly of ordinary members (1:26-31), consistent with the humbling message of 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1:18-25), so too his reaching was not contrived, but direct and plain. Yet weakness proclaimed by the weak among the weak has achieved much.

Paul came to Corinth to announce 'the testimony of God;' he had to make known the way of salvation rather than indulge in speculative rhetoric. 'Testimony' (*martyrion*) means just that—a

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

testimony or witness. A person can only testify to what he himself has seen or heard or experienced. Note: some translations have ‘mystery of God’ rather than ‘testimony of God.’ The words *martyrion* and *mystērion* have the same number of letters and are very similar. Manuscripts with both words are extant.

The ‘testimony of God’ reveals the divine authority behind the preacher’s message. God’s testimony is what He has revealed concerning Himself. If our message is the testimony of God, then our trying to improve it by human wisdom and eloquence is like holding up a candle to help the sun shine.

### *b) The Content (2:2)*

<sup>2</sup>*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

What is the ‘testimony’ (or ‘mystery’) that Paul came to proclaim in Corinth? Astonishingly and unimaginably it is ‘Jesus Christ and Him crucified.’ It is through Christ’s death that God saves His people. The right message is the good news of salvation through the crucified Christ.

Paul assured the Corinthians that he had not come to them with a lot of human verbiage and opinion. He presented them with the testimony of God and nothing else. Perhaps there were times when he was tempted to indulge in an emotional, demagogic airing of crowd-pulling issues. However, he recommitted himself to complete silence other than a resolve to expound the cross of Christ accurately and relevantly.

Paul knew he had a message that, in spite of its apparent weakness, was far more powerful than any form of human rhetoric ever could be. He knew that in that message, the very power of God was demonstrated.

We should not come to church to hear the pastor’s opinions about politics, psychology, economics, or even religion. We should come to hear a word from the Lord *through* the pastor. God’s Word edifies and unifies; human opinions confuse and divide.

## 2. Paul’s Method (2:3-4)

### *a) State of Mind (2:3)*

<sup>3</sup>*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling...*

One can have the right message and still not be doing true preaching. A preacher must also have the right method. Paul’s preaching at Corinth is an example of the correct method for all preachers. It featured neither eloquent style nor philosophical content. He purposefully omitted eloquence and philosophy and came preaching ‘in weakness and in fear and much trembling.’ It was entirely appropriate that he should have come to them as a weak messenger. In other words, Paul preached with a keen sense of his own inadequacy and utter dependence upon the Lord to carry the truth of the gospel home to human hearts.

Paul reveals his state of mind following labors in northern Greece and in Athens (Acts 16:9-17:34). Paul came to Corinth after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, run out of Thessalonica and Berea, and scoffed at in Athens. This and earlier experiences reminded him that he would never lack opposition. Upon arrival at Corinth, he trembled; obstacles to be overcome and the superficial foolishness masking what he had to say dissolved any lingering self-confidence. So anxious was Paul when he first arrived in Corinth that the Lord appeared in a vision at night encouraging him ‘not to be afraid’ (Acts 18:9).

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

Paul was not in the habit of flinching. On the contrary, the New Testament insists that he was characterized by enterprise (cp. Acts 16:28; 17:22; 27:21; 28:3). Yet being a Roman, a rabbi, and a scholar would be insufficient for the task given to him.

The ‘weakness’ in which Paul had come to Corinth was the weakness of the gospel, which is really the power of God (1:25, 27). By ‘fear’ and ‘trembling,’ Paul was not referring to mental timidity or to physical shaking. He preached boldly, lived boldly, and counseled other believers to be bold in the things of the Lord (Acts 13:46; 19:8; Eph. 3:12; 6:19). He used the phrase ‘fear and trembling’ in several other passages, each of which have to do with deep concern over an important, urgent issue (2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12).

### *b) Speech and Message (2:4)*

<sup>4</sup>...and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...

Both Paul’s ‘word’ (*logos*) and his ‘proclamation’ (*kērygma*) – possibly the format of his presentation – were meant to persuade, yet achieving this through the power of the Holy Spirit. He deliberately chose not to take the route of human wisdom or persuasion. He would not use all the tricks of the trade of the salesman or the peddler. He deliberately refused to adopt the media methodology of his day. Instead, he preached the cross of Christ, and God worked by his words, so that there was now a church in Corinth.

Human words of wisdom, no matter how impressive and persuasive, would have robbed the gospel of its power. He saw no place for calculated theatrics and techniques to manipulate response. Many have responded to an emotional appeal, without a true knowledge and conviction of God. Paul did not do that kind of preaching. He surely would have gotten a wider and more receptive hearing, but his hearers would have been left in their sins and without a Savior.

It is not a matter of eloquence being inherently wrong. But the preacher must never allow himself to think his eloquence is sufficient to convert souls. The power to convert resides in the gospel, not in our eloquence (Rom. 1:16). Think of what it meant for Paul to renounce wisdom and eloquence at Corinth of all places. Corinth boasted that its institutions of learning and its philosophers excelled those of Rome and Athens. And Paul came to Corinth from Athens where his preaching of the gospel had been received with skepticism and ridicule (Acts 17:16-34). If ever there was a time for Paul to reconsider his message and adjust it to the prevailing intellectual climate, it was after he left Athens and before he arrived in Corinth. Paul knew full well if there was one place where excellency of speech and philosophy would be impressive it was at Corinth. However, when Paul began to preach in Corinth, it was without any of the appealing embellishments so popular there. It was the same old gospel he had preached everywhere else.

Because he had a message, he proclaimed it with authority; Paul wanted men to respond – and trusted in the Lord to make his words effective. ‘Demonstration’ (*apodeixis*) means attestation. It is ordinarily used in rhetoric to mean ‘a compelling conclusion’ to a well-argued case. Here it should be understood as a ‘revelation’ from God following the preaching of the cross, showing God’s otherwise hidden power. That ‘demonstration’ is the morally changed lives of His people; when the Spirit operates, there is power. The Spirit’s power, then, is seen in the preaching of the cross, because that is the only message that can save, transform people’s lives, and make them new in Christ.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

The church is looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men. Only when holiness becomes our burning passion can we legitimately expect the Spirit of God to come upon us with the power Paul knew. True preaching combines the right message, which is Christ crucified, with the right method, preaching in the power of the Spirit. But there is still more. The preacher must also have the right motive.

### 3. Paul's Motive (2:5)

<sup>5</sup>...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul says here that he purposely designed his preaching to keep his hearers from trusting in his ability as a preacher. By glorying in various preachers, the Corinthians were doing the very thing Paul was most anxious to avoid! Faith that depends upon a polished preacher and a clever argument is always at the mercy of a more polished preacher and a more astute argument. But faith that rests on the power of God will never have to worry about being outmoded.

All this being so, how can some in the church revert to 'the wisdom of men,' the sour philosophy of a decadent society? 'The power of God' – by which is meant the cross of Christ plus all that it achieves – has been conspicuously evident in the apostle's ministry, and it is this that ought to remain in the minds of the Corinthians. Many have been guilty of wrongdoing in ganging up against Paul (cp. 4:1).

In summary, Paul has first taught that the way to convert people to Christ is to set forth the truth of the gospel. Secondly, the proper way to state the truth of the gospel is with a deep sense of insufficiency, realizing the success of the gospel depends, not on the skill of the preacher, but on the power of the Spirit. Thirdly, there is only one faith that converts sinners from the error of their ways and sets their feet on the path of life. That is the faith which comes to men through the power of God as the truth of God is preached.

### B. The Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6-9)

Paul was an extremely brilliant man, and he knew his discussion up to this point had left a door open for some of his detractors. He knew some would be inclined to ask if he was trying to infer by his rebuke of human wisdom that there is no wisdom to be found in the gospel. So in this paragraph, Paul says, in effect, that the gospel doesn't have to take a back seat to any other teaching in the matter of wisdom because it contains the very wisdom of God himself. His teaching up to this point has not been that there is no wisdom at all in the gospel of Christ, but only that it is a totally different kind of wisdom.

From verse 6 to the end of chapter 2, Paul turns back to the theme of wisdom, and provides a much more positive assessment of its function. He is keen to correct any misunderstandings the Corinthians may have. He is not against wisdom in itself, but that autonomous human wisdom which stands in arrogant independence of the cross and is even opposed to its message. By contrast, God's cross-centered wisdom is recognized and valued 'among the mature' (v. 6). This terminology introduces a set of contrasts that will be developed later in chapter 3. There, Paul contrasts the mature with 'infants' (3:1) – a contrast that reflects his distinction in the same verse between 'spiritual' and 'worldly.'

Paul's apologetic is introduced by 'for,' connecting with what has gone before, yet developing the argument: on the one hand there is 'the wisdom of this age' (v. 6), which Paul disregards, and

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

on the other there is ‘the mysterious wisdom of God’ (v. 7), the proclamation of which is his concern and that of his colleagues (‘we’).

The keyword in this paragraph is ‘glory.’ In essence Paul declares that he speaks ‘wisdom among the mature’ (v. 6) which he clarifies as ‘spoken in a mystery’ about a ‘glory’ beyond our imagination, which God has ordained before history for His people. In effect then, this passage is about the Christian’s sure and indescribable *hope* in the coming age. This present age is ‘passing away;’ there is no future here.

### 1. Is Not of This Age (2:6)

<sup>6</sup>*Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.*

The allusion to the ‘mature’ or ‘grown-up’ (*teleioi*), draws a distinction between such folk and some, perhaps many, in the Corinthian church. ‘Mature’ can mean ‘perfect’ (KJV) or ‘complete,’ but can also refer to a person who has full membership in a group, one who is fully initiated. ‘Those who are mature’ are those who are redeemed and are completely trusting in Jesus Christ. The apostle is not saying that he speaks God’s wisdom only when he is with believers who are advanced in the faith, but only when he is among believers who are truly in the faith—the saved. True believers are the only ones among whom the gospel can be wisdom. To all others it is a stumbling block or foolishness (1:23).

The ‘wisdom’ that Paul and his colleagues proclaim is not ‘of this age.’ ‘Age’ (*aiōnos*) refers to a period of time, a historic age. The same word, ‘age’ (*aiōn*), appears in 1:20; 2:7-8; 3:18; 8:13; and 10:11, and stands for the world of mankind with its castles of cards, rather than the created universe. You cannot learn God’s wisdom in the world or from the world, because the world, in its rebellion against its Creator, will always rule love and reverence for God out of the equation.

‘Rulers’ (*tōn archontōn*) means leading men, or men of authority. They are exemplified by those men immediately responsible for the death of Jesus rather than malignant spiritual powers (see v. 8). In the New Testament, the Greek *archōn* usually refers to human authorities (cp. Acts 4:26, quoting Ps. 2:2).

These rulers are ‘being brought to nothing’; God does not permit them to endure (cp. Is. 14:3-23; Ez. 28:1-19). They have no ultimate future. Those who marry the spirit of the age are very soon widowed. Paul’s meaning is that because the world, as represented by its greatest and its best, is temporary, it cannot possibly be the wellspring of eternal truth.

### 2. Is a Mystery (2:7a)

<sup>7</sup>*But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God...*

This verse opens with a strong word, ‘but’ (*alla*), juxtaposing this world’s values and those of heaven. The divine *sophia* is described in several ways. Firstly, it is ‘mysterious’ (*en mystēriō*), a term which is adjectival rather than adverbial; Paul does not speak ‘mysteriously.’ The latter interpretation would suggest that he was in the habit of whispering esoteric wisdom to a select few (e.g., the *teleioi*), behind closed doors. But it was never his practice to confide cryptic formulae to privileged hearers. The meaning is that Paul had preached openly, making known a secret now revealed publicly by God (cp. Eph. 3:4-5).

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

Why is human wisdom so totally helpless in this business of knowing the truth of God? Paul says it is because the truth of God is a mystery. A ‘mystery’ (*mystērion*) does not refer to something strange and puzzling but to that which is held secret. In the Bible a mystery is truth which is completely inaccessible to the unaided human mind. It is truth which God must reveal, or it would never be known. God intentionally holds His wisdom a secret from natural man and his earthly wisdom. It is a formerly ‘concealed’ element within God’s plan for His people that would have remained unknown had Yahweh not disclosed it. Human wisdom isn’t sufficient to understand the gospel because it is a mystery.

### 3. Is Eternal (2:7b)

*...which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*

Further this wisdom was ‘predestined before the ages for our glory.’ ‘Predestined’ translates *proōrisen*, which means decreeing the end of a program before it has begun. God planned the gospel so believers could be forgiven of their sins and could eventually share all of His glory in heaven. The fact is that believers don’t have to wait until heaven to know something of the glory of being delivered from their sins. There is tremendous glory in knowing the truth of the gospel and anticipating heaven.

We would know nothing of God if He had not condescended to make Himself known to us. We find the supreme revelation of this knowledge in ‘Jesus Christ and Him crucified.’ Yet this mystery, revealed in time through Christ’s birth and life, death and resurrection, was no emergency plan. It originated before time began and was destined to bring His people into His eternal glory, world without end. What a contrast Paul draws! The rulers of this age and those who follow them will lose their glory and come to nothing because of their rebellion against God and rejection of His Son. But the Lord Jesus has gained everlasting glory by His acceptance of His Father’s will, His obedience even to death on the cross, and we share in that glory as we are united to Him by faith.

### 4. Is Misunderstood by This Age (2:8)

*<sup>8</sup>None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

Although this wisdom was not known by the men who consigned ‘the Lord of glory’ to the cross, the fact remains that Jesus is the divine Lord, the God of Israel who is all glorious. The crucifixion is proof that the rulers of this age did not have God’s wisdom. Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas all stand condemned in the gospel narratives of Christ’s passion as ignorant, blind, and foolish, in spite of all their natural cunning, political skill, authority, and pomp. They conspired together to do away with the Son of God via crucifixion. Had they known who He was, they would not have dared to carry out such a heinous action. But they did not understand precisely because they were ‘of this age.’

Jesus Christ was the very Lord of glory and yet the smartest people of the day didn’t recognize Him. If they had recognized Him, they would never have crucified Him. He furnished them with all kinds of proof and evidence, but they regarded Him as an imposter and crucified Him. So much for the track record of human wisdom!

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

### 5. Is Prepared for Believers (2:9)

<sup>9</sup>*But, as it is written,*

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who love him”—*

This free quote from Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17 is often memorized, but it is also frequently misapplied. Paul is not referring to the wonders of heaven, but to the wisdom God has prepared for believers. Paul includes this quotation in order to contrast what the human senses can perceive with the hidden realities of God’s provision in heaven, for the knowledge of which we are entirely dependent on spiritual revelation. His point is that the natural eyes, ears, and hearts of men cannot know or comprehend His wisdom. It is prepared only for those who love Him.

Isaiah 64:1-3 travels back to the events of Sinai; in 64:4 Isaiah prays that Yahweh might work for His people just as He had done at the time of the Exodus. Paul appears to state that the answer to Isaiah’s prayer and the fulfillment, at least in part, of Jeremiah’s prediction (Jer. 3:16) are to be found in the first advent of our Lord.

Three related assertions are made about the wisdom of God in ordaining the death of Christ. Firstly, this wise plan of salvation has never been made apparent within the created universe: ‘the eye did not see’ the like in nature. Although the heavens declare the glory of God and the stars proclaim His handiwork, they do not reveal Christ. Only apostolic preaching can do this (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 10:18). Further, ‘the ear did not hear’ it. The plan of God has never been a theme of oral tradition; men have never detected anything of divine wisdom in the folklore, myths, and religions inherited from previous generations. Finally, the undoubted creativity of mankind has been unable to contrive such an amazing plan, the doctrine of Christ crucified always remaining beyond the ‘heart’ of any.

How does man come by his wisdom? First, there are those things he concludes from observation. In other words, he uses his eyes and ears. Man also knows various things by intuition, on the basis of the heart. But Paul says that man’s observation and intuition are utterly useless when it comes to the gospel of Christ. Why is this the case? Man by nature is totally depraved. His mind is darkened so that he cannot perceive the truth of God. His affections are degraded so he is unable to love the things of God.

Neither externally nor internally, objectively nor subjectively, can man discover God. His external searching is empirical, experimental—represented by seeing and hearing. God’s truth is not observable by the eye or the ear, no matter how many sophisticated instruments we may use. We are just as helpless in trying to discover His truth subjectively, through our minds (‘heart’). Rationalism cannot reason out God’s truth. Man’s two greatest human resources, empiricism and rationalism, his observation and his reason, are equally useless in discovering divine truth. They will always, in fact, eventually turn men against divine truth. Ultimately they lead men to crucify Christ. But God’s truth, God’s plan, God’s wisdom is not hidden from His children.

### C. The Knowledge of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-13)

Paul continues to speak about the unimaginable ‘glory’ of the coming age. The new emphasis now, however, is on the insight into that hope uniquely given to Paul as an apostle.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

### 1. Revelation (2:10-11)

How is it possible for Christians to understand the gospel when untold millions have been, and are, completely in the dark about it? The answer is that those who comprehend it have been ‘initiated’ by the Holy Spirit Himself. We may summarize what Paul says about the basis of the Holy Spirit’s work of initiation in two words – competence and correspondence. The competence of the Holy Spirit for revealing the truth of God arises from His perfect comprehension of that truth. And His perfect comprehension of that truth arises from His correspondence to the nature of God.

#### a) Competence (2:10)

<sup>10</sup>...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

The ‘rulers of the world’ are blind, deaf, and of darkened understanding in regard to God’s glorious future. ‘But to us [apostles] God has revealed it through the Spirit.’ Paul repeats and reinforces this contrast between himself and these ‘rulers’ throughout the passage (cp. vv. 12, 16).

Only the Spirit can reveal the hidden secrets of God because only He knows the unique intimacy of the Holy Trinity in which He lives, with the Father and the Son. The Spirit does not have to grasp an idea or a revelation and attempt to pass it on accurately, in the way that human teachers do. He is the very agent of revelation, so that what He discloses in His Word is the very truth of God.

Paul describes the gospel that remains hidden from man’s wisdom as ‘the deep things of God.’ Things established by God have been ‘revealed’ by Him to the objects of His choice. The marvel is that the Spirit is explaining to the prophets and apostles of the church (‘to us’; cp. Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11) the significance of the cross. The Holy Spirit is the divine author of Scripture. He uses many human agents, but the message is entirely His. The revelation is God’s pure Word.

‘Searches’ (*erauna*) is what is sometimes called a ‘timeless present,’ indicating that the Spirit never goes around, as it were, trying to find out yet more and more truth about God. Having the measure of everything, He penetrates the depths of the divine mind and with a view to disclosing them.

#### b) Correspondence (2:11)

<sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

The reason the Holy Spirit is able to comprehend the ‘deep things’ of God perfectly is the exact correspondence between Him and God. Matthew Henry says, ‘The man knows his own mind because his mind is one with himself. The Spirit of God knows the things of God because He is one with God.’ Here we come face to face with the Bible’s teaching on the Trinity. God is one God, but three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because He is God Himself, the Holy Spirit knows the things of God exhaustively and reveals them accurately.

An analogy brings into relief the nature of the Spirit’s understanding: we all accept that the human ‘spirit’ within an individual can alone plumb the secrets of his heart. Individual human wisdom is derived from an individual’s thought processes of enquiry and reflection. We all have

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

an inner thought life that is unknown, even to our nearest and dearest, to everyone in fact, except God!

Similarly, it is ‘the Spirit of God’ who ‘has known’ the otherwise unknowable thoughts of the personal God. The same is true of God, but on an infinitely greater scale. The perfect tense behind ‘has known’ (*egnōken*) means that the Spirit has comprehended the purpose of God in Christ, that He retains this knowledge, and (the verse presumes) that He has all along been prepared to reveal it.

Paul is implying that his message has led directly to the conversion of the Corinthians in that his gospel came from God, rather than being his, or anyone else’s, brainchild. No man could have been sufficiently ingenious to devise the scheme, let alone powerful enough to have put it into operation. All the apostle has done is to communicate this to the Corinthians – without embroidery or embellishment.

### 2. Inspiration (2:12)

<sup>12</sup>*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*

Paul has indicated that although he, in common with all believers, has received the Holy Spirit (cp. 6:11 and 12:13), he and other selected men, a subset within the churches, have been uniquely endowed by the Spirit so that they might understand (2:10, 12) and then expound (2:13) these benefits. Not all commentators agree with this interpretation, some commentators reasoning that because the Corinthians, just like the apostle, have received the Spirit, ‘we’ signifies both Paul and his readers. The apostle’s call is for the church to spurn the wisdom of the age – but not on the ground that all have received the Spirit. His assertion is that the wisdom proclaimed by him is from the Spirit who revealed it to him, and that if the Corinthians are sensitive – which apparently many are not (3:1) – they will accept this to be the case. This is why there is a ‘we-you’ tension running throughout 2:6-16).

The process of the Spirit’s transmission of God’s truth is called ‘inspiration.’ His truth cannot be discovered by man; it can only be ‘received.’ In order to be received, something must first be offered. God’s truth can be received because it is ‘freely given.’ The Bible is the Spirit’s vehicle for bringing God’s revelation.

### 3. Interpretation (2:13)

<sup>13</sup>*And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

The ‘we’ and ‘us’ of verse 12-13 (as in vv. 6-7, 10) do not refer to Christians in general but to Paul himself. God’s Word is for all believers, but it was *revealed* only to the apostles and the other writers of Scripture. Only those men properly can be said to have been *inspired*.

Paul assumes that although he has been granted an understanding of the divine wisdom, it does not follow that he, unaided, is able to explain it to others. Building on the statement of verse 12 that he and some others have been granted an understanding of the wisdom of God, Paul now makes a further disclosure; he has been granted exactly the right words with which to expound this mystery. ‘Explaining’ (*sygkrinontes*) means interpretation. Paul’s claim is that he has made spiritual realities understandable by means of Spirit-given words.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

Paul is claiming that the Holy Spirit revealed the truth of God through the ministry of the apostles. A little later, he claims the apostolic office amounts to having ‘the mind of Christ’ (2:16). Paul and the other apostles knew the content of Christ’s mind; His thoughts, His plans and purposes, and the self-sacrificing spirit that motivated Him (Phil. 2:5-11). All of this the apostles knew, not because they had been able to figure it all out by their own intellectual prowess, but because it had been given to them by the Holy Spirit.

In sum, 2:12 anticipates the evangelical doctrine of inspiration. By His Spirit, God has imparted wisdom to, among others, Paul. In 2:13 the apostle is specific: the Spirit has spoken to his mind and heart in language which he understands and with which he must relay divine truth. Total accuracy, both historical and in every other necessary respect, is presumed. Paul makes these assertions to remind the Corinthians that they should attend his exposition of divine *sophia* rather than look back to the prevailing culture with its predilection for hollow rhetoric.

What does this have to do with us? The apostles are long gone. If there are no apostles today, how is it possible for the Holy Spirit to initiate us into the truth of the gospel? The answer is that the apostles themselves committed to writing the revelation they received from the Spirit of God. In the New Testament, we have the essence of what the apostles received. Another way of putting it is to say the New Testament consists of spiritual truths placed into spiritual words. It is nothing less than the finished product of the Spirit of God revealing the truth of God! It is the Spirit of God Himself opening up before our eyes the deep things of God! It is the Holy Spirit leading us into the innermost chambers of the knowledge of God! It is ‘the mind of Christ’ revealed to us! This Word of God is the tool the Spirit uses when He initiates someone into the gospel (cp. Rom. 1:18; James 1:18; 1 Pe. 1:23).

### D. The Mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14-16)

#### 1. The Natural Person (2:14)

<sup>14</sup>*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

By ‘natural man’ (*psychikos anthrōpos*) is meant an unbeliever, *psychikos* possibly being employed because in the Septuagint *psychē* usually translates the Hebrew *nephesh*, meaning a ‘soul’ considered as a rational individual. The natural man is the opposite of Paul, the ‘spiritual man,’ to whom God has given insight into His glorious future.

Because he lacks spiritual discernment, which is the gift of the Spirit, the natural man cannot understand and so does not accept spiritual revelation. All he has are the human faculties of eye, ear, and intellect, and without illumination he is unable to grasp the truth of the gospel. He judges the world by what he sees. But the ‘spiritual man’ knows that the only way to explain the world is by God’s Word (cp. Heb. 11:3) and that only divine wisdom can reveal to us our true purpose and significance in time and in eternity.

It is possible to read the Bible and yet not understand it. It is possible to study the Bible for many years, memorizing much of it, and still not understand it. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day were highly trained in the Old Testament, yet they missed its central message. They completely failed to recognize the promised Messiah when He came and lived among them (John 5:37-39). Because these men did not belong to God, they *could not* understand. Those scribes

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

and Pharisees, like everyone else who rejects God, lived only in the realm of the ‘natural man.’ They had no means and no desire to understand the spiritual nature of God’s Word.

The natural man cannot know or understand the ‘things of the Spirit of God,’ because they can only be ‘spiritually appraised.’ ‘Spiritual’ is in opposition to ‘natural,’ and thus refers to the inner capacity of the redeemed to grasp God’s truth. To ‘examine’ or ‘discern’ (*anarkrinō*) means to evaluate, and ‘spiritually’ (*pneumatikōs*) is adverbial, equivalent to ‘by means of the Spirit.’ Devoid of the Spirit, the natural man cannot come to terms with the truths of God. God’s Word is spiritually evaluated, spiritually discerned, spiritually understood—and the natural man is spiritually dead.

### 2. The Spiritual Person (2:15-16)

#### a) Judgment (2:15)

<sup>15</sup>*The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.*

What does Paul mean by saying the spiritual person ‘judges all things’? His point is that the believer operates in two realms – the natural and the spiritual. The natural man’s discernment is limited to the things of this world (v. 14). The believer, like the unbeliever, is able to discern the things of this world, but there the similarity ends. The believer, drawing from what he knows of spiritual things, has a completely different attitude to, and judgment of, this world. He sees through the world and recognizes it for what it really is.

As God provides discernment for understanding His revelation, Christians are able to come to right and good judgments about all things. Because we have divinely revealed principles and standards, we can know right from wrong, wisdom from folly – and all from God’s perspective.

On the other hand, the ‘spiritual person’ (*ho pneumatikos*, literally ‘spirituals’) can evaluate ‘all things,’ being able to appreciate spiritual realities and discern the condition of the men of ‘this age’ (2:6), who do not possess the Spirit. That he ‘himself is examined by no one’ means that, for their part, they do not recognize him for what he is.

Paul says the believer is ‘rightly judged by no one.’ What does that mean? Simply, the believer is a puzzle to the unbeliever. The believer, because he operates in two realms, can understand the unbeliever; however, the unbeliever, operating in only one realm, cannot understand the believer. He sees the believer going to church and fails to understand the attraction of it. He sees the believer denying himself the pleasures of sin and he is mystified. But even further, the truth of the gospel liberates us from living under the judgment of other people’s opinions of us. The natural man’s judgments on spiritual matters have no authority and Christians are not subject to them.

Unlike God’s revelation and inspiration, which were given to the biblical writers, His illumination is for *all* Christians. We all can rightly appraise the Word when we rely on the Giver of the Word. Because the natural man cannot rightly appraise God’s Word, he cannot rightly appraise God’s people, either. They *try* to appraise believers, of course, but they are always wrong. They may accurately evaluate our faults, shortcomings, and our living that is inconsistent with our faith. But they cannot accurately evaluate our faith. If the gospel itself is a stumbling block and foolishness to them, so is faith based on the gospel.

## 1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

### b) Understanding (2:16)

<sup>16</sup>“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

The principles set out in 2:14-15 are reinforced by an allusion to the Septuagint version of Isaiah 40:13, which translates something like this: ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord, and who has become His counselor – who will counsel Him?’ But Paul modifies rather than cites, omitting the central ‘Who has become His counselor?’ and applying Isaiah’s question in a Corinthian context. The expected reply to both Isaiah and Paul is ‘no one.’ For the apostle, this means that the person who lacks the Spirit can discern neither the wisdom of the gospel nor the status of its heralds.

‘Mind’ (*nous*) signifies ‘intention,’ ‘plan,’ ‘purpose,’ or even ‘agenda’ or ‘program.’ This term is translated ‘understanding’ in 14:14, 15, 19. Paul has been enabled to comprehend the divine *nous*, alias *sophia*, a program centered upon the Lord. ‘We’ refers to Paul and (presumably) other inspired men.

God made His mind known by revelation through the Spirit directly to the apostles and indirectly through them to their readers then and now. We enter into the ‘mind of Christ’ as we read carefully the text of these apostolic letters and apply their teachings to ourselves.

For next time: Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-17.