

## **1 CORINTHIANS**

### **7) "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery"**

#### **Read Chapter 2: 6-16**

We could write over Chapters 1-4 the words "that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written" (4: 6). To prove that no one at Corinth had any reason to say "I am of Paul...Apollos...Cephas", Paul points out in Chapter 1 that the way in which they had been saved and, generally speaking, the type of people who were saved, did not give any ground for 'glorying in men'. To say "I am of Paul" was utterly wrong. They had not been saved through his wisdom. In Chapter 2, Paul goes further and points out that the preaching under which they were saved, and the teaching given after they were saved, did not give any grounds for 'glorying in men' either. To give Paul credit for his preaching and teaching was, again, utterly wrong. Neither flowed from his wisdom.

In outlining Chapter 2 we suggested that the passage clearly falls into two parts: **(1)** how Paul preached the gospel (vv.1-5); **(2)** how Paul taught the saints (vv.6-16).

#### **1) HOW PAUL PREACHED THE GOSPEL, vv.1-5**

In this connection we noticed the following: **(a)** the method of Paul's preaching at Corinth (v.1); **(b)** the message Paul preached at Corinth (v.2); **(c)** the manner in which Paul preached at Corinth (v.3); **(d)** the might (or power) of Paul's preaching at Corinth (v.4); **(e)** the motive (or purpose) of Paul's preaching at Corinth (v.5). This brings us to:

#### **2) HOW PAUL TAUGHT THE SAINTS, vv.6-16**

As Leon Morris observes, "Up to this point Paul has been insisting that the Gospel owes nothing to human wisdom...But he does not mean that Christianity is contemptible, and now proceeds to show something of its profundity and dignity. It embodies *the wisdom of God*. In the light of this all petty human wisdom fades away". Before we address the details of the passage, we must take time to notice the occurrences of "**not...but**" in the chapter. As J.M.Davies (*The Epistles to the Corinthians*) observes, "the apostle follows a common practice of teaching by contrasts": **(i)** "And my speech and my preaching was

**not** with enticing words of man's wisdom, **but** in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (v.4); **(ii)** "That your faith should **not** stand in the wisdom of men, **but** in the power of God" (v.5); **(iii)** "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet **not** the wisdom of this world...**but** we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery" (vv.6-7); **(iv)** "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. **But** God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (vv.9-10); **(v)** "Now we have received **not** the spirit of the world, **but** the Spirit which is of God" (v.12); **(vi)** "Which things also we speak, **not** in words which man's wisdom teacheth, **but** which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (v.13); **(vii)** "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. **But** he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (vv.14-15).

Having said that his preaching was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (vv.4-5), Paul now turns to the wisdom that he *did* use: "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes (*archon*, a ruler) of this world, that come to nought" (v.6). He emphasises that the wisdom he employed **was not his own**. They had therefore no reason to glory in him.

This section of the chapter may be divided as follows: **(a)** the use of divine wisdom (vv.6-8); **(b)** the revelation of divine wisdom (vv.9-11); **(c)** the purpose of divine wisdom (v.12); **(d)** the imparting of divine wisdom (v.13); **(e)** the recipients of divine wisdom (vv.14-16).

#### **a) The use of divine wisdom, vv.6-8**

"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: **but** we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory".

The use of the word "howbeit" indicates that the emphasis of the chapter is changing. In vv.1-5, Paul has been emphasising that he did not employ **human** wisdom in his preaching, but that is not to say that he never used wisdom at all. In his own words, "we speak wisdom

among them that are perfect", the difference being that it was **divine** wisdom. It should be said, of course, that whether Paul was preaching the Gospel or teaching the saints, he **always** used divine wisdom. In the first case, apart from "them which are called, both Jews and Greeks", the Gospel message was a "stumblingblock" to the former and "foolishness" to the latter. In the second case, Paul refers to saved men and women who had the capacity to understand and enjoy the treasures of divine wisdom. We should notice some further contrasts:

**i) Paul contrasts two kinds of wisdom, v.6.** He contrasts "the wisdom of this world (*aion*, meaning 'age')" (see also 1: 20) and "of the princes (*archon*, meaning 'rulers') of this world" (v.6) with "the wisdom of God" (v.7). Paul contrasts the wisdom of earthly rulers ("the princes of this world", v.6), with the wisdom of the Supreme Ruler ("God", v.7).

The "princes (rulers) of this world" are mentioned because they, above all people, ought to have exhibited more wisdom than anyone else. Some commentators, "both ancient and modern" (Leon Morris) suggest that "the princes of this world" are demons, but this can hardly be the case in view of what is said about them in v.8. Demons certainly knew the identity of the Lord Jesus (see, for example, Mark 1: 24, 34).

**ii) Paul contrasts two kinds of people, v.6.** He contrasts "them that are perfect" with "the princes of this world". The word "perfect" (*teleios*) means 'full grown' or 'mature'. Perhaps there is a touch of irony here: the believers at Corinth were behaving in a most immature way (see 3: 1-4). Some hold that Paul is referring here to saved men and women ("them that are perfect") as opposed to unbelievers, but this hardly seems likely. Leon Morris must be right in saying that Paul "simply recognises the facts". Not all Christians have full understanding. He refers to "babes" among them (3: 1). "The wisdom of which he speaks is appreciated by those who are mature in the faith. To them he can impart 'all the counsel of God' (Acts 20: 27)...When men first believe they do not all at once grasp the full implications of the faith. At first all are 'babes'. But the way to advance is open to everyone. There is no spiritual truth that is not available for even the humblest believer to appropriate" (Leon Morris). By contrast "the princes of this world" have no conception of divine wisdom.

**iii) Paul contrasts two destinations, vv.6-7.** He contrasts the "princes of this world" which "come to nought (will be rendered inactive)" (v.6), with believers who are heading for "glory" (v.7). We

cannot overlook the fact that in His incomparable wisdom, God had in mind "our glory", as we shall see next, "before the world"! The word rendered "ordained" (*proorizo*) "denotes to mark out beforehand, to determine before" (W.E.Vine). Staggering, isn't it?!

**iv) Paul contrasts two ages, vv.6-7.** He contrasts "**this world** (*aion*, meaning 'age')" with its wisdom and princes, with God's sovereignty "**before the world**" ('before the ages' *aion*)." Even more staggering!

**v) Paul contrasts two conditions, v.7.** He is either contrasting the clarity of his preaching with the inability of man to understand it (it is "hidden" from him), or stating the fact that he is teaching what had been previously unrevealed. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom..."

- **As to the former**, Leon Morris observes that "the word 'mystery' signifies a secret which man is wholly unable to penetrate. But it is a secret which God has now revealed...Paul describes the secret as the hidden wisdom emphasising the fact that men outside Christ are still in the dark about it. It is revealed to believers, but it is not a matter of common knowledge among the sons of men. It remains hidden from unbelievers", reminding us of the Lord's words, "thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11: 25-26).

- **As to the latter**, J.M.Davies makes the pertinent observation that Paul states very clearly that the gospel had been the subject of promise and prophecy (Rom. 1: 1-2; Gal. 3: 8). But the truth regarding the church, the union of Jew and Gentile in one body with the exalted Christ as its head, was a hidden mystery revealed only in New Testament times". This explanation does seem to be supported by what follows: "the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory." Charles Hodge (*1 & 2 Corinthians*) is most helpful here: "Having in v.6 stated what this wisdom is not, he here states what it is. It is, first, the wisdom of God; secondly, it is mysterious or hidden; thirdly, it is a system of truth which God from eternity had determined to reveal for the salvation of His people. In other words, it is the revelation of the counsels of eternity in reference to the redemption of man".

**vi) Paul contrasts two dignities, v.8.** "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery...which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory". On the one hand we have "the princes of this world", and on the other,

"the Lord of glory".

- **"The princes of this world"**. Paul's statement here about the ignorance of the "princes of this world" agrees with words of the Lord Jesus himself, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). Notice what the Jews said in John 10: 33, but the 'dying thief' evidently knew who He was (Luke 23: 42). "The act and the attitude of 'the princes of this world' exhibit a complete, not to say wilful, ignorance of the nature, character and grandeur of the Lord and of the purpose which He came to accomplish" (W.E.Vine). We should add that it was in the wisdom of God that they didn't know it. "In the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God" (1: 21). The Lord Jesus is "the Prince (*archegos*, author) of life" (Acts 3: 15).

- **"The Lord of glory"**. We cannot fail to note the contrast: they "crucified the Lord of glory": crucifixion, with all its degradation and shame; "the Lord of glory", said to be "the loftiest title Paul ever applies to Christ". Paul certainly assigned to Christ the highest place of all" (Leon Morris). Compare Acts 7: 2, "The God of glory"; Psalm 24: 7-10, "the King of glory". The words, "they...crucified the Lord of glory" are reduced to two words by Matthew: "And sitting down they watched **him there**" (Matt. 27: 36).

### **b) The revelation of divine wisdom, vv.9-11**

"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. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 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". We should notice here **(i)** what has been revealed (v.9), and **(ii)** how it has been revealed (vv.10-11).

**i) What has been revealed, v.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".

The 'flow' of the passage becomes clear when we read vv.7-9 as follows: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery...which none of the princes of this world knew...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. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit". Since God's eternal purpose for

His people is "a mystery", it is 'hidden wisdom', it cannot be understood by natural faculties ("Eye hath **not** seen, nor ear heard..."), but only as it is revealed by God ("**But** God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit"). It is through Him that we acquire this heavenly and divine wisdom.

Verse 9 cites Isaiah 64: 4: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him". The words "beside thee" emphasise that this was divinely sealed and not made known to men, which is not at all surprising when we read on: "behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned...But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...." (Isa 64: 5-6). Ezekiel was told, "Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee..." (Ezek. 40: 4). What Ezekiel was to see and hear was previously unrevealed, but was now to be made known to him by the Lord.

We are told that "in the last days perilous times shall come" and "men shall be lovers of their own selves...ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3: 1-7). But here Paul refers to those that love God. Through grace, we have responded to His love for us, and, wonder of wonders, He responds to our love for Him: "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**". Compare Romans 8: 28.

*ii) How it has been revealed, vv.10-11.* "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 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".

We must complete the often incompleated quotation: "But God hath **revealed** them unto us (initially to the apostles and prophets, and through them to the Lord's people generally) by his Spirit." That is, we **do** know "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him". We could not have known them, however, apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The words "unto us" are important. These things have been made known, not to "learned philosophers" but to "humble Christians" (Leon Morris). Not that this should give us any sense of superiority: it is not because of our skill or wisdom that we know these things, but solely due to the fact that God has revealed them to us by the Holy Spirit.

The ability of the Holy Spirit to reveal divine truth to us is explained as follows: “for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 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” (vv.10-11). Amongst other things, this emphasises His personality and His deity. The word “searcheth” does not mean searching in the sense of acquiring information not previously known to Him, but searching in the sense of scanning the counsels and purposes of God. In the words of Leon Morris, “It is a way of saying that He penetrates into *all things*”. It stresses His complete knowledge and understanding. “In particular Paul specifies *the deep things of God*. *Deep* is often used of the mighty deeps of the sea, and thus comes to signify ‘unfathomable’. It points to the impossibility of any creature knowing the innermost recesses of the divine counsel, ‘the depths of God’. But they are known to the Spirit, and it is the Spirit who has revealed the truths of which Paul speaks” (Leon Morris).

The words, “For what man knoweth (*oida*: to see or perceive, to have fulness of knowledge) the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth (*oida*) no man, but the Spirit of God” (v.11), mean that just as it is impossible to know what is in a person’s mind by external observation, since only the person concerned knows that, so it is impossible to know what is in the mind of God by external observation. Only the Spirit of God knows this. Hence Paul is teaching that it must be divine revelation. Put another way, as no one knows the thoughts of a man but the man himself, so no one knows the thoughts of God but God himself. Therefore no one but a divine Person is competent to reveal them.

### **c) The purpose of divine wisdom, v.12**

“Now we have received, **not** the spirit of the world, **but** the spirit (‘Spirit’, JND) which is of God; that we might know (*oida*) the things that are freely given (*charizomai*, to bestow graciously) to us of God”. There was no reluctance on God’s part in preparing “for them that love him”. Everything is “freely given to us of God”.

We are privileged to be in the good of the only means of knowing the mind of God! “That we might know the things that are freely given us of God”. We are told that this is in the aorist tense: the things that have been once and for all given to us.

The verse emphasises what has been said in vv.9-11. We could put it

like this: 'I have been telling you that divine things can only be known as they are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Now this is the very Holy Spirit that we have actually received. If it was the spirit of the world, then we could never know these things, but since it is the Spirit which is of God, we can know them'.

**d) The imparting of divine wisdom, v.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". While we must agree with Leon Morris in saying "what the Christian receives he passes on", Paul evidently refers here to the transmission of God's word as revealed to His spokesmen.

Thus far Paul has spoken of reception of divine wisdom now he speaks about its communication to others. If in v.10 we have 'revelation' by the Holy Spirit, and in v.12 'illumination' by the Holy Spirit, then in v.13 we have 'inspiration' by the Holy Spirit (J.M.Davies). Paul received 'divine wisdom' through the Holy Spirit, and he imparted it by the Holy Spirit.

The words, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" are not easily explained, but since the word "comparing" (*sunkrino*) means "to join fitly, to combine" (W.E.Vine), leading to the translation "communicating spiritual [things] by spiritual [means]" (JND). According to Leon Morris, this depends on the gender of the second occurrence of 'spiritual' (*pneumatikos*) being neuter. If it is masculine, then the meaning is conveyed by the RV footnote (supported by W.E.Vine) 'interpreting spiritual things to spiritual men'.

If Paul is referring here to his preaching in general, then we have to decide which of the two suggestions is more appropriate, but if Paul is referring to the inspiration of Scripture, then there is no doubt about the meaning. He is speaking about the verbal inspiration of Scripture, that is, that the "men used by God to write the Holy Scriptures did not use words of their own choosing, but put down the words as directed by God...The Holy Ghost supplies the language as well as the substance of revelation". (J.Hunter). It follows, of course, that divine truth must always be conveyed in a spiritual manner, not by means which appeal to men, nor by human ingenuity and wisdom.



**e) The recipients of divine wisdom, vv. 14-16**

"The natural man (the unrenewed man: man under the influence of his fallen nature) receiveth **not** (*dechomai*, referring to a ready and favourable reception) the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (*anakrino*). **But** he that is spiritual judgeth (*anakrino*) all things, yet he himself is judged (*anakrino*) of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ".

It is a case of the natural man versus the spiritual man. As pointed out above the words "discerned...judgeth...judged" all translate the same word (*anakrino*). Because they are in possession of the Spirit of God and taught by Him, the children of God (not just leaders and teachers) have the faculty of discerning and understanding spiritual things. The unsaved do not have this faculty. "The man whose equipment is only of this world, the man, who has not received the Holy Spirit of God, has not the ability to make an estimate of things spiritual" (Leon Morris). They are "spiritually discerned", not 'rationally discerned'. The "natural man" might be an educated man, or a man with theological training, but he is still not fitted to receive and understand "the things of the Spirit of God".

The words, "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" mean that while the spiritual man (the man indwelt by the Spirit of God) has the ability to make a right judgment about "all things", the "secular, as well as the sacred" (Leon Morris), the unregenerate man ("the natural man", v.14), who cannot understand divine things ("they are foolishness unto them", v.14), cannot understand the people who do understand divine things! Christians are a riddle to non-Christians. They cannot understand why we enjoy spiritual things. So we must not expect to be understood!

The closing words of the chapter, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?", citing Isaiah 40: 13 ("Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?"), emphasise what has already been said, namely, "the things of God knoweth no man". But the added words, "but by the Spirit of God" (v.11), indicate that believers do know "the mind of the Lord". Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (v.10) believers "have the mind of Christ". (The fact that "the mind of the Lord" in Paul's reference to the Old Testament, is the "mind of Christ in the New Testament, emphasises

the deity of the Lord Jesus). As Leon Morris points out, Paul does not mean by this "that the Christian is able to understand all the thoughts of Christ" but that the "spiritual man...does not see things from the viewpoint of the worldly. He sees them from the viewpoint of Christ".

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