

INTRODUCTION

In the last section (**1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5**), Paul was systematically dismantling the Corinthians' infatuation with human wisdom – the root of the division in the church. This human wisdom is time-bound and leads only to frustration and eventual destruction.

The Greek word for wisdom is *sophia* from which we get such English words as sophisticated. In the minds of these Corinthian Christians (sadly), the message of the Cross was not sophisticated enough.

Here in this section (**1 Corinthians 2:6-16**), Paul will show that there is real and true wisdom – “*Wisdom however we speak . . .*” is how Paul puts it in the Greek. Paul is not against wisdom (rightly defined and understood) and what he is proclaiming is not devoid of wisdom. The gospel is the wisdom of God. This wisdom is eternal and limitless. It leads people from darkness to light, salvation and glory. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential for man to understand the gospel.

DETAILED STUDY

1. What can we say about the wisdom that Paul proclaims?

The answer is from **verses 6-7**.

➤ *Mystery*

Paul calls it 'mystery'. It is a word that Paul likes to use in his writings (20-21 times). For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:51, he says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – " or in Ephesians 3:3-4, "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)".

The word simply means a divine truth that was once hidden but now God is pleased to reveal. This means this truth is completely inaccessible to the unaided human mind, it is something that God must reveal or men will never know it.

➤ *Ordained*

It is something that God has planned/ordained before the ages, that is, from all eternity, and it is planned/ordained for a very specific group of people --- "those who love Him".

This means it is something that is targeted – not for everyone, but for "those who love Him" and it is unconditional – not in response to some events or actions, but planned in eternity.

➤ *Lord of glory . . . for our glory*

It concerns a Person – the Lord of glory and it has a destination – for our glory. The two words hence function as shorthand for the content of this mystery/wisdom.

It talks about how God became man, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the Cross and rise from the dead for our salvation. When we believe in the Lord of glory, our sins are forgiven and we are justified and adopted. God continues to work in us, working to make our condition equal to our status. Our status is holy. Our condition is yet holy, so He is actively at work to make us holy. When we are fully and perfectly holy, we will be received into His eternal home. One day, the Lord of glory shall return, and all His people will be glorified together with Him. This is the destination He is bringing us to – for our glory, glorified with Him, and then to spend eternity gloriously with the Lord of glory.

This message can be summed up by a simple song produced by Sovereign Grace Music:

*Holy God, in love be-came
Perfect Man to bear my blame
On the cross He took my sin
By His death I live again*

In summary, we see that the gospel proclaimed by Paul is God's wisdom. It was hidden from men, but according to God's sovereign mercy, He reveals it to some people. This gospel (how sinners can be right with God) has been planned from all eternity for God's people. This gospel centres on Jesus Christ and in it we see God's power and wisdom in saving depraved sinners and transforming them into glorious saints with Christ.

2. The mature understands the wisdom Paul proclaims. Who are they?

The Greek word for 'mature' is teleiois. In our English Bible, it has been translated as 'mature' (1 Corinthians 2:6), 'perfect' (Matthew 5:48) and 'adult' (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Before we can know who the mature are, we have to see who stands in contrast to the mature – the rulers of this age (v6, 8). These rulers of this age are ruled by the wisdom of this age (V6). Who are these rulers of this age?

In the context of Christ's crucifixion, it would have to refer to men like Herod and Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas. They were the civil and religious leaders of the day. Using their wisdom (the wisdom of this age), their final response was to reject Jesus and nail Him to the Cross. It was a response of unbelief.

We can also think of Paul before his conversion – the persecuting Saul of Tarsus. A very learned man and a very religious man as well, he used his wisdom then – wisdom of this age – and his conclusions led him to persecute the church! It was a response of hostility.

The overall message therefore is that if you use the wisdom of this world, not only will it lead you to foolishness, not only will it ultimately destroy your soul, it will also led you to crucify the Lord of glory! Hence, believers who are so enthralled by the world's wisdom are actually running to and siding with the camp of crucifiers!!

It is now clear that the people who stand opposite to the mature are unbelievers. Because of they rely on the wisdom of this age, their response to Jesus was one of unbelief and hostility. Therefore, the mature here is a reference to believers!

The message is devastating! As far as salvation is concerned, unbelievers are like children -- immature, cannot see what is really important, sport with what is truly precious while believers are like adults – mature, see and appreciate the really important and value the truly precious.

3. How does one understand the wisdom Paul proclaims?

Wrong way

*Paul's use of **Isaiah 64:6** in **verse 9** highlights the wrong way people used to get wisdom. To the world, we attain wisdom by observation (using our eyes and ears) and reasoning (using our mind). This works for many things in this world, but when it comes to the gospel, to God's wisdom, it falls flat on its face.*

The scientist can use his eye and observe experiments and nature, but he will never just with his eye bring to him the wisdom of God. A philosopher can listen to arguments of men, philosophies of men, theories and hypothesis of men, but he will never just through listening or even through looking learn the wisdom of God. A mathematician can use his mind, a theologian can use his mind and even use the word of God with his mind, but that alone - to think with the mind - will never bring to him the wisdom of God. The senses alone that men use for human wisdom cannot perceive God's wisdom. Neither can a man know God externally.

We have evidences of God in the lights of the sky, the stars, the trees, nature - but he can't really know God fully through nature. Nature will not save you, neither can man know God internally, although Romans tells us that God's law is written upon our hearts - we have something in us that is, if you like, on God's side, a conscience no matter how seared or buried it may be - but a conscience cannot save you!

Right way

From verses 10-12, these three words point us to the right way: revealed, received, freely given to us. The mature are mature because God has revealed the gospel to them by an act of His sovereign choice, not because of any skill or wisdom on our part.

God's wisdom is not acquired by human effort, like climbing up a ladder or meeting a condition in a qualifying test, or by human achievement – because you're a cut above the rest. The wisdom of God is not acquired by men but revealed by God! It is something that is given to us by grace through faith in the Spirit of God.

Divine wisdom is received bended knees.

4. Verse 10 says, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” How should we understand the revelation of the Spirit?

In His mercy, God gave the Spirit to the apostles, to reveal to them the gospel. These apostles then proclaim this wisdom to people, and again by His mercy, wrote down their message so that today we can read it. Without the revelation of the Spirit, no one will know the gospel.

In His mercy, as the gospel is preached (by the apostles then or by preachers proclaiming what the apostles have written), the Spirit works in us, illuminates us (opens our blind eyes and shines light for our eyes to see), so that we can see and understand and accept God's wisdom.

In summary, what we have here is revelation through inspiration (for the apostles) and illumination (for us), and all these take place by God's sovereign grace and mercy, nothing to do with what we have done or achieved.

5. **Verses 14-16** contain the summary of this section. What is it saying?

- **Natural man**

This is the first group of humans. He judges this world by what he sees and explains everything by the use of his sensory perceptions and his reasoning power. The 'natural' conclusion of such an approach is that he will not welcome the gospel, but refuse and reject it. The reason for his rejection of the gospel is that the gospel can only be understood spiritually, and the natural man does not have the ability to do so. Here is a statement of the sinner's spiritual inability.

- **Spiritual man**

This is the second and other group of humans. Because of what God has given to him freely, he is able to understand life. And because of this wisdom that he has, he will go in a certain direction that is a puzzle to the natural man. Indeed, the natural man will find it strange and odd and even mad for the spiritual man to do

what he did. The natural man cannot understand the spiritual man because the natural man (first and foremost) cannot understand spiritual things (gospel).

This is like an island of the blind and one with eye-sight parachute into it and talked to the inhabitants about sunrise and sunset. The blind men can't understand what he is saying, after some time starts to get annoyed with him and finally may even attacked him!

Only those who possess the Holy Spirit can appreciate sophia. Paul here proclaims a wisdom that is superior to all competitors, as it is divine wisdom.

- **Mind of Christ**

*The first part of **verse 16** is a quotation from **Isaiah 40:13** and **Jeremiah 23:18**. Paul sends by saying that we have the mind of Christ. This is a very bold claim by Paul! He claims that all Christians have the mind of Christ! We know what Christ thinks because we receive the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of Christ knows the things of Christ!*

A quick scan of the New Testament will tell us that the mind of Christ would include these:

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!

You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Matthew 16:21-27).

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Discuss: What's the meaning of these two passages with respect to the mind of Christ and how should it affect our daily lives as Christians?

There are two groups and only two in this world: the natural and the spiritual. Christians belong to the second group. Christians have the mind of Christ. Hence it is a betrayal of our identity and of the gospel when we follow the lead of the natural man!

CONCLUSION

What's the message of this section? How is this section connected to the previous section and the problem of division in the church raised in **1:10-17**?

In this section, Paul shows that us the gospel Christians believe in is in truth God's wisdom. We can see it is wisdom and embrace it only when the Spirit of God comes to us and opens our eyes. And the Spirit comes to us solely by the pure, electing, sovereign grace of God.

Our response ought to be rejoicing in God's grace, and delighting in God's wisdom, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! This is the apt conduct of people who are spiritual and who have the mind of Christ.