

United in Christ: Overcoming the Challenges of Diversity
Studies in 1 Corinthians
The Message of the Gospel is God's Wisdom

Intro: In our lesson last week we looked at Paul's response to those who placed too much emphasis upon the speaking ability of their teachers as the evidence of their wisdom. Though the Corinthians had not thought Paul very wise because he did not come to them with excellent speech, Paul affirms that the message he preached was truly wise. Let's read the paragraph again:

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; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 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; 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. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 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. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 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. 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. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:6-16)

What is Paul's central thought in this section? Though he avoided the use of "human wisdom" in the content of his message and in the manner of presentation, his gospel reveals to the spiritual God's wisdom.

Last week we considered the first two points in Paul's defense:

- 1. The wisdom of the gospel is of divine, not human origin.**
- 2. This divine wisdom was hidden from the wise of this world.**

Now let's consider Paul's two remaining points.

This divine wisdom was revealed by the Holy Spirit through Christ's chosen messengers.

God revealed His wisdom by the Spirit.

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

Paul first states that what God had planned and had not entered into the heart of man, God revealed by the Spirit. Just as it is impossible to know the thoughts of another, except they reveal them; so no one can know God's mind unless he chooses to reveal it. This is the role of the Holy Spirit, to search the "depths" of God, His wisdom, and reveal it to man.

God's wisdom was revealed by Spirit-guided men like Paul and Apollos.

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

It is true that all the Corinthians were to possess the Spirit after their conversion; but Paul seems to be focusing here on those who taught them the gospel—men like himself and Apollos whose wisdom was being judged by the Corinthians. Paul revealed several important conceptions about the Spirit's work in them:

The Spirit reveals the things that God seeks to freely share with His creatures to chosen messengers.

Those messengers, like Paul and Apollos, spoke those things to the Corinthians.

The Spirit revealed those spiritual things, not with the rhetoric of human wisdom, but in spiritual words that conveyed the spiritual things. The last phrase "combining spiritual with spiritual" might be translated in more than one way. The word "combining" might also be translated "explaining." Some prefer spiritual thoughts to spiritual people; but since Paul has referred to both thought and words, the NASV seem like a good translation.

This wisdom spoken by the messengers of Christ is appreciated only by those who are spiritual or mature.

The natural man will not see the wisdom in the gospel.

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. (1 Cor. 2:14)

This text has been subject to numerous interpretations and demands that we carefully define our terms.

The natural man apparently refers to those, like the Greeks, that Paul had already said considered the gospel to be "foolishness." They are, of course, unbelievers; but perhaps the stress is on the fact that they approach life from a worldly rather than a spiritual mindset. They evaluate things only in terms of this earthly life.

The "things of the Spirit" is simply a way of describing the wisdom of God that the Spirit had revealed.

The expression "he cannot understand them" does not suggest that the natural man's intellect is limited; but that the gospel intends to appeal to the spiritual—to the man whose heart seeks for God and is open to His message.

The expression “spiritually appraised” has to do with the basis upon which the gospel message is judged. The word seems to embody the idea of questioning or examining so as to reach a judgment or verdict about someone or something. The natural man in examining the gospel rejects it because of his earthly orientation.

The spiritual man will see the wisdom in the gospel.

But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:15-16)

Paul makes two observations about the spiritual man:

He appreciates the value of the wisdom in all things that have been revealed.

Paul’s point is clear. Only people of a particular mindset will judge the gospel worthy of acceptance and action.

The spiritual man sees the value of the gospel and the wisdom contained in it; and thus accepts “all things” that the Spirit has revealed.

Yet he is not appraised as wise by the natural man.

But what does Paul mean when he says the spiritual “is appraised by no man.” This phrase is very difficult; but it appears Paul is extending his argument to say that the natural man cannot appreciate either the wisdom in the message nor the wisdom in the one who accepts it.

Paul ends with a powerful contrast. On the one hand those who pretend to be wise according to this world, cannot offer a single word of wisdom to God: “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?*”

On the other hand, those who like Paul divest themselves of human wisdom, possess the greatest wisdom of all: “We have the mind of Christ.”

How these points speak to the Corinthian problem

Though the Corinthians pretended to be superior based on human wisdom, Paul show them that the truly wise and truly mature are those who value the wisdom of the gospel and put it into practice. In such people there will be no stress on human wisdom; instead they will simply value and build their lives upon the principle of God’s wisdom manifest in Christ and His cross.

How these points speak to us today

First it helps us answer the question, “Where is wisdom?”

True wisdom is to be found in the Scriptures—in the written revelation of the Spirit given through the apostles and prophets of the NT.

Second, it helps us answer the question, “To whom does God’s wisdom appeal?”

God’s wisdom appeals to those who are spiritual in character. We waste time when we change the gospel to appeal to everybody. The wisdom of God is not appraised by the natural, but the spiritual man.

Third, it helps us answer the question, “Who is truly wise?”

It is not the one who seeks to advance himself by demonstrating his knowledge on all subjects of this world, or who uses his rhetoric to impress others with his “wisdom.”

Instead the truly wise man is the one who embraces the message of Christ crucified and lives out that message by exalting Christ to others, by refraining from personal self-promotion, and by sacrificing for the benefit of those around him. Such a person may not command worldly respect; he may not be very impressive personally; he may not be thought to be particularly wise; but he/she will be in good company. That’s the same thing they said about the apostle Paul!

Conclusion: As we serve God in a world where professed intellect and skillful verbiage can impel a person to great heights, it is important to remember that no man by his own intellect even began to know the answer to the most important question of all, “How can I be right with my creator?” That answer was to come only from the mind of God by the Spirit through those Christ chose to reveal His truth unto the spiritual who gladly received it as true wisdom from God. Consequently the world may think us really foolish for believing in the gospel; but we can take comfort in this truth: “We have the mind of Christ.”