

1 Corinthians 2 • Two Kinds of Wisdom

Introduction

This is really an extension of the discussion established in chapter 1. There are many who admire the world's ideas and the way they are presented with such polish and eye-appealing dressing who desire to adapt them for use within the Church. They fail to learn that true Christianity is about **crucifying** the old life – killing it off completely in order to attain to a completely new life. In other words, salvation is not just an initiation rite but a milestone when we begin to unlearn the world's approach and thinking in favor of a totally new way of seeing and thinking in accordance with the mind of God. This is one of the reasons Scripture repeatedly teaches that God hates a mixture, because the Word and ways of God cannot abide being diluted by that of the world. It is out with the old wisdom and in with the new.

¹And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ²For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

⁶Yet 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; ⁷but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸the 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;

[Read v.1-8]

Q: What are the two messages which were preached by Paul?

A: The first message described in v.1-5 is the Gospel, the second message described in v.6-8 is "a mystery".

Q: What are the distinctions Paul makes when it comes to how he presented the Gospel message?

1. It was not man-made ("with superiority of speech or of wisdom"), but God-inspired ("the testimony of God"). (v.1)
2. It was wholly focused on the work of the cross. (v.2)
3. It was presented in genuine fear and humility. (v.3)
4. It was not framed by man's polished standards of oratory ("not in persuasive words of wisdom"), but with genuine spiritual authority ("in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"). (v.4)
5. The goal was not to establish himself ("that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men"), but Christ ("but on the power of God"). (v.5)

Application: When we preach the Gospel we are to be more concerned for the message and how it will be received as coming from God rather than man. When we attempt to use what the world considers a polished presentation of information or an exchange of ideas, we risk elevating the personality presenting the Gospel over the Person of Christ in the Gospel.

Q: Why might Paul be demonstrating a lesson he recently learned concerning the sharing of the Gospel in Greece?

A: Before coming to Corinth Paul's famous encounter with the Greek philosophers and intellectuals in Athens occurred. (Acts 17) It would seem that the message was received only by a few in a place which prized human ideas and debate. (Acts 17:32-34) This experience in concert with his personal conviction that only the plain Gospel is the power of God may have directly contributed to his ministering "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling". (v.3)

Q: What is the distinction Paul makes about wisdom?

A: In preaching the Gospel it is important to avoid the pollutive effects of "the wisdom of men" so that they might receive the Gospel; but when it comes to the wisdom of God, this is reserved to be taught **AFTER** the Gospel has been received.

Q: What is the biblical definition of "a mystery"?

A: It is a truth hidden in ages past which is revealed by the Holy Spirit to those who belong to God's family. Think of it as a "family secret" known only to the initiated.

Q: What do you suppose is this “mystery” which comes after the Gospel to be preached “among those who are mature”?

A: It is probably best explained in detail in Ephesians 2-3, that Jew and Gentile are “one in Christ” through faith and make up the one body which is the Church.

Q: Why can this never be understood by “none of the rulers of this age”?

A: It can only be understood through the prompting of the Holy Spirit which can only come through the working of the first message, the Gospel and the work of the cross.

Application: *It is certainly necessary to declare the Gospel to the lost, but it is equally important to teach God’s wisdom to those who are maturing in the faith. It is impossible to build a strong church using only the Gospel; there needs to be the teaching of the plan and “mystery” of God leading into the deeper things. It is never about just making “converts” but “disciples”.*

⁹but 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.”

¹⁰For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹For 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. ¹²Now 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, ¹³which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

[Read v.9-13]

Q: What are the two things which are now being contrasted by Paul?

A: The “spirit of this world” and “the Spirit of God”. (v.12)

Q: How does this relate back to the two messages presented in the previous verses?

A: The spirit of this world speaks “in words taught by human wisdom” as opposed to “those taught by the Spirit”. (v.13)

Q: So who is going to be the recipient of “things...not seen and ear has not heard”? Why has that wisdom not “entered the heart of man”? (v.9)

A: It only comes to those who received the first message, the Gospel which is fixated on “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”. (v.2) Until that happens there is no indwelling of the Holy Spirit and no break from living according to “the spirit of the world”.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

— Ephesians 2:1–3

Point: *The wisdom of “the spirit of the world” inflates egos and blinds minds so as to lead them away from the simple truths of God’s Word, much less the deeper ones. Because they do not want the Bible, they reject the deity of Christ and the need for salvation through the cross. It was ignorance which led men to crucify Christ originally and this repeated ignorance by which they have repeatedly crucified Him ever since.*

Q: How does Paul say that Isaiah 64:4 is fulfilled?

A: The wisdom of God is revealed exclusively through Spirit-filled Believers.

Q: Why is this actually a practical matter?

A: As stated in v.11, just as only a man’s spirit can know a man’s thoughts, only the Spirit of God can make known God’s thoughts.

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Q: But how is this accomplished? How does the Holy Spirit communicate?

A: According to v.13 the Holy Spirit teaches “in words”. The phrase “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” might be best understood as “explaining spiritual things to spiritual people”. Scripture is the Word of God given by the Spirit of God. This is affirming the authority and priority of God’s Word. There is an old saying, “Prayer is us talking to God, Scripture is God talking back to us”.

Point: Only Spirit-filled Believers will ever fully comprehend the complete, full, and deeper meaning of God’s Word. No unregenerate person will ever understand it as anything more than an academic exercise according to their earthly thinking.

Application: There may be a need to engage in a formal debate on issues such as evolution, abortion, the difference between religions and so forth, but if the discussion is never brought around to the issue of the need for Christ through the working of the cross, it is all futile. Without salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the so-called “deeper” questions will never be resolved. There is no access to God without first going through the Christ on the cross.

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

[Read v.14-16]

Q: What are the two kinds of people in the world today?

A: The “natural man” (v.14) and the spiritual man (v.15).

Q: Who exactly can be determined to be “a natural man”?

A: Someone who has not accepted the first message of the Gospel. They therefore have not received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and therefore “does not accept the things of the Spirit”. (v.14)

Q: What does “the things of the Spirit” mean?

A: They cannot know “the thoughts of God” (v.11) as revealed by the Holy Spirit through God’s Word. This is why every unregenerate life fundamentally rejects God’s Word completely or to such a degree that it is rendered ineffectual in them.

Q: How would this description of “a natural man” be particularly appropriate for the Greeks Paul had been trying to reach?

A: In 1 Co. 1:23 Paul established that the Greeks thought the Gospel – the first message – was “foolishness”. Their philosophy and understanding could not explain a God who died on a cross or a God who cared for, much less was interested in, the problems of mortals. Their attitude about the physical body was such that they could not even conceive of God coming in human flesh. Until the work of the cross is embraced, these are the types of obstacles experienced by every unregenerate person.

Q: What characterizes a spiritual man?

A: The Spirit-filled Believer exercises discernment and is able to judge and evaluate things with God’s insights. In fact, he himself cannot be figured out by the natural men because they are a spiritual puzzle to them. (“...he himself is appraised by no one”.) (v.15) Ultimately the spiritual man is characterized to “have the mind of Christ” (v.16) because they no longer think and operate according to the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God.

Application: Bible study is not a daily, ritual obligation to identify our self as “Christian”. In fact, it is a pursuit by which over time we cease to think and operate according to how the world thinks in favor of God’s way of thinking. The first message of the Gospel initiates a transformation which becomes complete in attaining to the second message of the meaning and working of God’s Word as revealed through the Spirit.

Overall Application

One of the surest ways to distinguish the difference between the regenerate and unregenerate is by their approach to Scripture. Those not having accepted Christ as their Savior will always reject all or part of Scripture outright and/or introduce something outside of the Bible as allegedly having authority. For cults there is always a Bible “substitute” such as the Book of Mormon or the Quran, and for deceived or false Christians there is some greater authority given to an outside voice such as papal encyclicals or so-called “prophets” who claim their “newer” word exceeds **THE** Word. This can often be seen in how Paul contrasts the wisdom of this world with the wisdom of God in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians:

The Wisdom of This World

1. A wisdom of words (1:7; 2:4)
2. Man’s words (2:4)
3. The spirit of the world (2:12)
4. Foolishness to God (1:20)
5. The philosopher (1:20)
6. Ignorance (1:21)
7. Leads to condemnation (1:18)

The Wisdom of God

1. A wisdom of power, not words alone (2:4-5)
2. The Spirit’s words (2:13)
3. The Spirit of God (2:14)
4. Foolishness to men (2:14)
5. The preacher (1:31; 2:4)
6. Knowledge of God (2:12)
7. Leads to glory (1:18; 2:7)

Although most people and organizations want to elaborate on the “second” message pertaining to the deeper mysteries of God, whether it is an individual, movement, or entire denomination, the way Scripture is handled reveals the truth of whether they have received the requisite “first” message of the Gospel. Where God is concerned there is no wisdom where there is no regenerate relationship embraced exclusively through the work of the cross.