



1 Corinthians - Chapter Two

- II 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21 - Divisions over Christian Preachers (continues)
- II.b 1 Corinthians 1:18-4:21 - God's wisdom answers the problem (continues)
- II.b.i 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16 - The nature of God's wisdom (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Two

Paul commences this chapter by reminding the church in Corinth that, unlike the philosophers of the day with their well crafted rhetoric and witty presentations, he had come to them in weakness yet with a profound message of truth. The Gospel, already described by Paul as foolishness to the Greeks, was actually delivered to them by the power of God's Holy Spirit and that is why its truth can be believed.

It is this message that reveals the true wisdom of God. For in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had revealed his depth of love for his created beings and had offered them a different path to that which appears to so many through the actions of a world corrupt and dying in this present age.

II.b.i.2 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 - Proclaiming Christ Crucified

Paul avoids Greek rhetoric and focuses on the message of the Cross, so that the Corinthians would put their faith in the Christ who was crucified, rather than in the ability of human messengers with their own agendas.

¹ When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2:1

The opening verse is almost a repeat of what Paul had stated earlier in the letter:
<<*For Christ did not send me to baptise but to proclaim the gospel, and not*
New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised 1Corinthians2-1

with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power>> (1 Corinthians 1:17). Refer to the comments made there.

The mystery of God. Modern science has provided mankind with a wealth of knowledge with regard to the formation of the universe and the creation of new life within the human body and other creatures. Yet still so much has not been uncovered, such as the spiritual bonding that can occur naturally between a newborn baby and its parents. Such things cannot be taught or learned. The purpose of life is one of the biggest mysteries for those who do not know God. And those who do are perhaps in awe of even deeper mysteries yet to be revealed.

² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:2

For I decided to know shows that Paul had made a deliberate decision to accept the message of the Gospel, i.e. Jesus Christ, and him crucified. This is the message that he then taught to others: <<*For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles*>> (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). In fact Paul would even boast of it: <<*May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*>> (Galatians 6:14). It is almost certain that Paul went further than teaching the crucifixion, for it is the power of the resurrection that makes the story unique!

This second verse is the revelation of the mystery just mentioned; it is Jesus as the Christ of God. This is something Paul describes elsewhere in greater detail: <<the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me. For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge>> (Colossians 1:26-2:3).

³ And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

1 Corinthians 2:3

I came to you in weakness is something that actually reveals an inner strength in Paul's character and others like him: <<*We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute*>> (1 Corinthians 4:10), and: <<*Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?*>> (2 Corinthians 11:29).

⁴ My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

Not with plausible words of wisdom. The story of this man being executed by the Romans in Jerusalem some years earlier would not have sounded much like being an event that would change the world. However, the truth of the message was supported by a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That is, God equipped Paul with the ability to heal the sick supernaturally: <<*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works*>> (2 Corinthians 12:12). Although God wants people to respond to the Gospel in faith, he does at times offer miraculous signs as a catalyst for that faith. As time went on and the message became established the need for such signs has decreased.

So that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Mere intellectual persuasion does not save people. Saving faith is produced by the heart-changing power of the Holy Spirit as the Gospel is proclaimed. It is demonstrated by those who believe the message: <<*But what does it say? 'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*>> (Romans 10:8-9). Later in that letter it became Paul's prayer: <<*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*>> (Romans 15:13).

II.b.i.3 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 - The True Wisdom of God

The rulers who executed Jesus did not understand what they were doing: <<*Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing*>> (Luke 23:34). Paul and the Corinthians would also have failed to understand Christ's death apart from the Spirit's revelation to them about its meaning: <<*And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God*>> (Romans 8:27), shows that God searches, Greek *eraunaō*, the human heart, probably by his Spirit. However, in the following passage, the Spirit searches even the depths of God. God's Spirit bridges the chasm between the deep things of God and the human heart, graciously enabling human beings to understand the message of the Cross, which would otherwise be incomprehensible.

⁶ Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish.

1 Corinthians 2:6

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom. Such people are those more mature in faith, which many in Corinth were not: <<*I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready*>>

(1 Corinthians 3:2). The writer to the Hebrews expresses a similar viewpoint, for many of his readers had not matured: <<***For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food***>> (Hebrews 5:12). Yet this is not necessarily a bad thing for everyone: <<***Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation***>> (1 Peter 2:2).

Wisdom of this age probably refers to the different philosophies that abounded in the region at the time. However, such wisdom exists in all ages and often changes with culture and fashion. Such wisdom found the crucifixion of Jesus to be scandalous in the eyes of the world, whereas, at the heart of the Christian message, there is the clue to the deepest mystery of life - God's love of people.

Paul here draws on a crucial distinction to which he will return frequently throughout the letter. This, indeed, is one of the main things he wants the Corinthians to learn. World history divides into two ages or epochs. There is the 'present age', the period of history characterised by human rebellion, sin, despair and death. Then there is 'the age to come', the time when the one true God will be sovereign over all the world, bringing to an end the rule of all forces that oppose him. And the point is this: 'the age to come' has already broken in to the present age in Jesus the Christ. His death and resurrection form the decisive break, the moment when the great melody of history has begun to be heard in a major key instead of a minor one.

One of the reasons, in fact, why the mystery of the Gospel is a mystery, is because nobody in Corinth or most other places would ever think of looking for the secret to life, the universe, God, beauty, love and death in a place of execution outside a rebellious city wall in the Middle East. That is why, as Paul says, not only were the Corinthian Christians themselves, for the most part, neither wise, powerful nor aristocratic, but also he himself, when he announced the message to them, found himself in fear and in much trembling (v.3).

The rulers of this age is probably a reference to such earthly rulers as the Jewish chief priests and the Roman procurator Pilate, who sentenced Jesus to die (v.8), but by analogy it also includes all rulers who do not believe in Jesus. Such people are doomed to perish because they have not believed in Jesus: <<***Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God***>> (John 3:18).

⁷ But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

1 Corinthians 2:7

God's wisdom, secret and hidden. This wisdom of God is centred on Jesus Christ and includes all of God's plans for the history of salvation from before the ages: <<***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love***>> (Ephesians 1:3-4), to the unending future of eternity: <<***Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in***>>

heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever'>> (Revelation 11:15), <<And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever>> (Revelation 22:5).

It includes everything Paul preaches: <<Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God>> (Acts 20:27).

⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

1 Corinthians 2:8

Had the Romans or the Jewish leaders known that Jesus was God incarnate they would not have crucified him. Paul makes this statement, not that he believed that those in power would have shown Jesus the respect and honour he deserved, but because they would have realised they were signing their own death warrants.

The Lord of glory is a clear reference to Jesus with a similar reference in one of David's messianic psalms: <<Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle>> (Psalm 24:7-8). This was confirmed by his brother: <<My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?>> (James 2:1). However, it is a title also given to his Father in heaven: <<And Stephen replied: 'Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran>> (Acts 7:2). This provides further insight into the Father and Son being of one essence: <<I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one>> (John 17:20-22).

⁹ But, as it is written,

'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him' –

1 Corinthians 2:9

This beautifully crafted passage alludes to the words in Isaiah 64:4. However, some commentators claim the words were taken directly from another ancient Jewish book of wisdom that is now lost to history. The verse links creation with the gifts of God, especially the life of his Son, and the future glory that will come in God's time: <<For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind>> (Isaiah 65:17). Even those

who have committed their lives to God, whether through Judaism or even through Jesus, will never fully comprehend the magnitude of God's gracious gift.

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10

These things God has revealed to us. Such revelation comes to those who have accepted the invitation to return to God through the Son, but remains hidden from those who have not as confirmed by Jesus: <<*He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'*>> (Matthew 13:11). Paul indicates that he received his knowledge and understanding by direct revelation: <<*for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*>> (Galatians 1:12). This probably happened during the intervening years between his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, recorded in Acts 9:1-31, and being called into ministry by Barnabas: <<*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they associated with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'*>> (Acts 11:25-26).

Revealed to us through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has many roles, one of them being teacher or helper: <<*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you*>> (John 14:26).

¹¹ For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:11

What is truly human is the sinful nature: <<*The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse – who can understand it?*>> (Jeremiah 17:9).

The human spirit was given by the breath of God: <<*then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being*>> (Genesis 2:7), and it should be noted that both the Hebrew and Greek words for breath can also mean spirit. Humankind were the only ones in the creation account to receive a spiritual element within their beings in this manner. It is the part that is most revealing: <<*The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord, searching every inmost part*>> (Proverbs 20:27).

Only the Spirit of God comprehends, that is, understands fully, what is truly God's, i.e. what he truly desires from his people and what is going on in their hearts.

¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

1 Corinthians 2:12

Now we have received not the spirit of the world. The Spirit given to those who follow Jesus is the one that identifies their adoption as children of God: <<**For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'**>> (Romans 8:15).

The Spirit that is from God indicates that both the substance and the verbal expression of the apostles' witness to Christ are from God.

Understand the gifts. Paul has stated that true believers receive the Spirit of God within them and that it is this same Spirit that knows the mind of God. Therefore, believers now have the ability, through Jesus, to also know the mind of God, or his will for them at least. However, this revelation also has its consequences: <<**Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse**>> (Romans 1:20).

¹³ And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

1 Corinthians 2:13

Those who are spiritual. Although the adjective spiritual, Greek *pneumatikos*, could refer to things or words rather than to people, Paul seems to be turning now to the subject of spiritual people, as in: <<**And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ**>> (1 Corinthians 3:1).

As Paul has just made clear, only the Spirit can render the message of the Cross truly comprehensible to someone, so every Christian is a spiritual person, i.e. those led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is similarly described by Paul in: <<**But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him**>> (Romans 8:9), <<**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit**>> (2 Corinthians 3:17-18), and: <<**In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit**>> (Ephesians 1:13). Unbelievers, on the other hand, do not have the spiritual capacity to understand the things of God (v.14).

¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually.

1 Corinthians 2:14

Those who are unspiritual, are unable to understand because they do not receive God's Holy Spirit, who is the one who reveals the truths of God and makes the Gospel truly comprehensible: <<*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you*>> (John 14:16-17).

¹⁵ Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

1 Corinthians 2:15

Those who are spiritual discern all things. Although discernment is often manifested as a special gift for some, it is also one that all believers can acquire when it is appropriate to exercise it: <<*My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted*>> (Galatians 6:1).

They are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny because it is God alone who judges people: <<*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me*>> (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

¹⁶ 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?'

But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16

Paul again quotes from his favourite prophet, this time it is from Isaiah 40:13. He also referred to this passage in Romans 11:34.

We have the mind of Christ. Those who have accepted the Gospel adopt the mindset of their Lord because he has taught them according to God's will: <<*I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father*>> (John 15:15).