

1 Corinthians 2:1-16 – “Operating On A Different Level”

Chapter 1 ended in us seeing the need to glory in the Lord. Paul’s point was that there was nothing to boast in of ourselves. God isn’t looking for impressive people, He’s looking for people that are impressed with Him and are looking to simply share the greatness of God. In this chapter Paul reveals his desire to shine the light on Jesus and keep everything about Him.

1. Weak But Mighty In God – 2:1-5

2:1-2 - *And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

Paul came into a city where it would have been very tempting to duel with the philosophers and the intellectuals, those who were filled with *worldly* wisdom.

“Corinth put a premium on the veneer of false rhetoric and thin thinking”

(Barclay). Paul could have easily debated with the best of them.

But if Paul began to conduct himself in this way, he feared that people would be more impressed with the messenger than with the message.

- It’s a temptation I think many people that preach and teach the Word can face. You want to sound good, look good, appear wise, but often times you’ve only left people with a view of you.
- A certain church had a beautiful stained-glass window just behind the pulpit. It depicted Jesus Christ on the cross, but the pastor usually blocked the view of it. One Sunday there was a guest minister who was much smaller than the regular pastor. A little girl listened to the guest for a time, then turned to her mother and asked, “Where is the man who usually stands up there so we can’t see Jesus?”

Paul wanted to be sure this was not happening. He wanted people to see Jesus! He already said in **1 Corinthians 1:17**, *“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”*

Paul didn’t want to get into debates, or trade in eloquent exercises with the people of Corinth, he just wanted the message of Jesus to be shared and the power of the cross to be central. It’s this reality of Jesus, His death on the cross, that is *THE* good news that has power to change lives! Why distract from that?

2:3-4 - *I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴ And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,*

It's weird to think of Paul this way. He always seems like such a strong, confident and capable individual. Yet he reveals that he was shaking in his boots as he came and shared the gospel. Why would this be the case?

Perhaps he felt like this would be another city where preaching the gospel would land him in a world of hurt as people would try to silence him by force. Perhaps he felt like the philosophers would greatly outnumber him and he would be in for a real challenge.

- Remember the Lord came to him with a comforting and needed word: **Acts 18:9–10**, *"Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."*
- Paul's commission was to speak not shake. So with all this worry and fear he was to simply preach what he knew changed lives – Jesus! His preaching was tied to a demonstration of the Spirit's power because it's the Spirit that truly transforms lives. No amount of philosophy or human wisdom can do that.
- A story is told of Dr. Harry Ironside who was invited to share his testimony at a church service. While there an agnostic challenged him to a debate. Dr. Ironside accepted on account of 2 conditions.

First, he must promise to bring with him one man who was for years what we commonly call a 'down-and-outer.' I'm not particular as to the exact nature of the sins that wrecked his life and made him an outcast from society ^¾ whether he was a drunkard, or a criminal of some kind, or a victim of any sensual appetite. He must be, however, a man who for years was under the power of some evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who, on some occasion, attended one of this gentleman's meetings and heard him speak, glorifying agnosticism and denouncing the Bible and Christianity, and whose heart and mind as he listened to such an address were so deeply stirred that he went away from that meeting saying, 'Henceforth I, too, am an agnostic!' or words to that effect, and as a result of embracing that particular philosophy he found that a new power had come into his life. The sins that he once loved, now he hates, and righteousness and goodness are henceforth the ideals of his life. He is now an entirely new

man, a credit to himself and an asset to society $\frac{3}{4}$ all because he is an agnostic."

Secondly, he must bring a woman who had previously attended one of this gentleman's meetings and heard him loudly proclaiming his agnosticism and ridiculing the message of the Holy Scriptures. As she listened to him, hope was born in her heart and she said, 'This is just what I need to deliver me from the slavery of sin!' She followed this teaching, then, until she became an intelligent agnostic or infidel. As a result, her whole being revolted against the degradation of the life she had been living. She fled from the infamous place where she had been captive so long and today, rehabilitated, she has won her way back to an honored position in society and is living a clean, virtuous, happy life, all because she is an agnostic."

Dr. Ironside said if you could produce 2 people like this, I'll bring 100 people that have been gloriously saved through the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The agnostic waved his hand in rejection and walked away. All those in attendance that day knew full well that no philosophy of negation, such as agnosticism, could ever make bad men and women good, and yet they knew from observation and experience that this is exactly what Christ has done for centuries and is doing every day.

2:5 - *that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

It's so important that we don't try to win people based on gimmicks, entertainment, or human wisdom. If a person is saved by the wisdom of man, then his faith will rest on man's wisdom. It becomes a shallow faith. It's actually a false faith because it's not based on the things of God.

- Again, it's the power of God that draws people in and changes lives. It goes beyond an intellectual appeal, and it appeals to the very heart and brings about a transformation that only the power of God can do.
- This power of God is also looking to the very means by which He would provide our salvation. He would give His Son up on the cross to bring about forgiveness and life. It was the antithesis of wise to those who are in the world, but to those of us who have put our trust in Him, it is truly the power of God. It was the greatest thing done so that we could be spared.
- **1 Corinthians 1:18**, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

2. Real Wisdom – 2:6-9

2:6-8 - *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

So again, for some this talk of the cross (the power of God) was foolishness. But Paul reiterates that those who preach the cross are actually speaking wisdom.

- Ever have people just dismiss your faith in Jesus and think you're just some nut in a cult? They think you've given up all wisdom.
- Paul wants those who see Christianity and the cross as foolish to realize that we are actually making a lot of sense to those who are mature.

Now who are the **mature**? Often times Paul used that word to speak of Christians that have matured in spiritual understanding compared to others who were still infants in Christ. But in this context it seems to favor that Paul is speaking of those who are saved (mature) versus those who are not.

This wisdom that is shared among the mature (believers) is not a wisdom that is recognized by the world (unsaved). In fact Paul says that all the wisdom and rulers of this age – those that seem to have it all together and will even at times mock and scoff the faith we hold to – **are coming to nothing**. Don't ever feel like you're lacking or falling short in intellectualism or wisdom. When you have Jesus you've attained to the greatest wisdom. Everyone else will see that they've missed out when everything they've aspired to comes to nothing.

The wisdom that Christians enjoy is **a mystery**.

- This mystery is not a riddle to be solved. This mystery spoke of the plan that God had all along to save the world. It was concealed in the O.T. but revealed in the N.T. God has had a plan in place to give His Son as a ransom that those who put their trust in Him would be forgiven and saved.
- "God's wisdom is a mystery to man's mind... Strength through weakness, wisdom through foolishness, life through death, victory through defeat has never been a theme of man's wisdom. The paradox of the cross is illogical to man. It's a mystery hidden from man's mind. That mankind knew nothing

of God's wisdom became apparent the day the Jewish scholars called out for Jesus' blood, and ordered His execution." (S. Adams)

- This could be who Paul has in mind regarding the **rulers of this age**. Perhaps he's speaking of various worldly powers that think they're pushing through their agenda but are in fact accomplishing God's agenda.
- It could be that he's referring to principalities and powers of the air – Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31). You see, Satan I believe had full knowledge that God planned to send a Saviour into the world to save mankind. This was not a mystery to Satan. But, Satan thought he could thwart God's plan by killing the Saviour. Satan thought he won a great victory that day when Jesus was crucified, but much to his chagrin, Jesus was the one standing in victory that day.
- This wouldn't have been the route that Satan would have taken if he understood God's plan, if this mystery was known to him.
- This brings much comfort to me, because there are times where I can feel like Satan is gaining a victory. *Why does he seem to be having his way? Yet God is patiently saying to us, just hold tight, it's all going to blow up in his face.* Satan's plans will crumble because God is in control and working it all out for His glory!

But not only is He working it out for His glory, it says He's working it out for our glory! Verse 7 says, **which God ordained before the ages for our glory**.

- **1 Peter 1:20–21**, *"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you ²¹ who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."*
- In other words, through the work of Jesus on the cross, we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life – He is our hope of glory!
- **Colossians 1:27**, *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

2:9 - But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

This verse is often used to speak of heaven; that God has prepared so much for us in the heavenlies that we cannot even comprehend it. No eye has seen anything close to it. Now, while this is true regarding heaven, this is not the right

interpretation of this verse as we look at the immediate context of it. Paul is speaking of what God has done for the believer presently. Paul is referencing Isaiah 64:4 and paraphrases it to reveal the things that God does in a person's life in unimaginable until they truly experience it.

What Paul is getting at is the fact that many people have not seen clearly the things that God has prepared for them. The grace and mercy that's been displayed, the wonderful plan of salvation where Jesus gave up His life to spare ours. Where God brings us into a wonderful family and community among the saints. But it's a different story for us. Look at the next verse:

3. The Spiritual Man vs. the Natural Man – 2:10-16

2:10 - *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*

We don't have to be left out in the dark. We don't have to walk around in a spiritual stupor as though we don't know what is going on or what we have attained to. Some Christians sadly do. God has revealed them to us.

The truth and the wisdom of God has been shown to us, and it's the Spirit that continues to illuminate truth to us. It's truth unattainable through our own wisdom.

- It's exciting to see someone read the Bible after giving their life to Jesus and suddenly it just comes alive. Or think of a Jewish person celebrating the Passover – suddenly in Christ this all takes on a radically more complete picture.

...what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? It's the spirit of man who really comprehends the things of a man. No one can really know my heart except my own spirit. People cannot truly know my attitudes or feelings except myself. I know where my heart is (for the most part). And in the same way, it's the Spirit of God who ultimately knows the things of God. We can try and fathom God, we can act as though we have Him figured out, but it's only through the Spirit that we can really know Him.

2:12-13 - *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's*

wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

We don't have to continue being led by the things of the world that only bring a person into greater bondage, rather we have received the Spirit of God by which we may know all the things that He has freely given us.

- Press into this wisdom through the Spirit. Don't just scratch the surface or go for a little nibble when you can have a feast on the blessings and knowledge of God.

"Verse 13 is one of the strongest passages in the word of God on the subject of verbal inspiration. The Apostle Paul clearly states that in conveying these truths to us, the apostles did **not** use **words** of their own choosing or words dictated by **man's wisdom**. Rather, they used the very words **which the Holy Spirit** taught them to use. And so we believe that the actual words of Scripture, as found in the original autographs, were the very words of God (and that the Bible in its present form is entirely trustworthy)." ¹

...comparing spiritual things with spiritual... This is a bit of a confusing passage. The Greek word for comparing – *sugkrino*, is more rightly defined as combining. Which better fits the verse here. In other words Paul is saying we combine spiritual things with spiritual. We take the spiritual truths we've been shown, and we share them or speak them with the spiritual words the Spirit teaches us.

2:14 - But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The natural man is speaking of those who aren't believers. They're not going to understand the things of God because they're not born again, born of the Spirit. That's why when we are witnessing to people, it's not up to our strategy, delivery, or choice of words. It's a matter of the Spirit. It's the Spirit who needs to open their eyes, and bring this understanding to them. Does that mean we're off the hook from witnessing? Nope. But we need to understand what we're up against and be praying for the Holy Spirit to remove the blinders.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1753). Thomas Nelson.

2:15-16 - *But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.* ¹⁶ For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

The word **judges** is probably a bad choice of words. It's the same word used for discerning in vs. 14. In other words, we who are spiritual, we who have the Spirit in us and guiding us, are discerning of all things. We now have the ability to see that which is right and wrong; that which pleases God and that which doesn't. We no longer need to fall prey to the vices of the world.

yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. This doesn't mean that the spiritual man is above correction. Paul's writings are filled with correction to believers. Rather this is speaking of how a natural man cannot judge a spiritual man because he doesn't understand him. He knows not spiritual things, thus is unable to judge spiritual people.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 40:13 in vs. 16. We don't have anything to offer God. We can't reveal anything new to Him or instruct Him. But He can reveal much to us through His Spirit. ***We have the mind of Christ.*** We no longer think like the natural man or as the world thinks. We look at things from Christ's point of view. We think God's thoughts, His values, and His desires.

This is where Paul is taking the Corinthian church who has been disputing and dividing; this church that was struggling to walk in the wisdom of God. We don't have to fall prey to the things of the world, we don't have to look at the work of God as though it's foolishness. We can discern that all that He does is good and right!