

Study 3: 1st Corinthians Chapter 2

Introduction

The primary issue Paul addresses is the fragmentation and power play that has been happening in the church. In seeking worldly wisdom, they had neglected God's wisdom. To emphasise the point, when Paul came he didn't profess "wisdom" but rather came presenting nothing but the crucified Christ.

If we are to know Christ, then we have to understand that the kind of wisdom we need is not the kind that the world seeks, and is a mystery to the world.

Body of the Study

What was Paul's approach when he first came to Corinth?

What is the maturity that Paul is talking about

What is the mystery that Paul discusses?

How were these things revealed to us?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What are some "current" examples of worldly wisdom, and how do these compare to Godly wisdom?*
- *How can we use Paul's approach to the gospel in our outreach work?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 3 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

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In chapter 1 we saw how the play for positions of power from the world had invaded the church. In this chapter we see how the supposed wisdom of the world had invaded the church (probably related to the first issue, as those in positions of power were those the world may have considered "wise").

Body of the Study

What was Paul's approach when he first came to Corinth?

Paul had been in Athens, and came to Corinth with some degree of trepidation – in fact *fear and trembling* (1:2:2). But Paul describes his lack of oratory skills (he is comparing himself to Apollos), or a perceived lack of wisdom (as the Corinthians might compare him to the Greek philosophers). Importantly, Paul came in a spirit of humility. What was important was the presentation of the central theme of the gospel - the cross of Christ.

We should point out at this stage, that it was not the literal cross that Paul thought was important – it was just a couple of pieces of wood – and if God had thought that the literal cross was important, then He would have ensured that it was preserved. What is important is what the cross *represents*.

Paul is understating his skills and education here. Remember that he was very well educated in Greek in the "University City" of Tarsus, and then was educated in the Jewish school of Hillel under Gamaliel (in Jerusalem) and was recognised as being beyond those of his age. We should recognise that he was less skilled as an orator than Apollos (c/f 1:2:4 and Acts 18:24).

The issue that Paul is addressing here is the same one that he has discussed in the previous chapter – there were factions in the church, and people were taking a variety of sides. Rather than have any reason why anyone should side with Paul, when he came to Corinth, his approach was to present the gospel, not himself – "...*that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God...*" (1:2:5 NKJV).

What is the maturity that Paul is talking about

Paul discusses wisdom – wisdom of the world compared to Godly wisdom. Worldly wisdom doesn't amount to anything. The world around us thinks that these people are special, or amount to something, but their so-called wisdom will just come to nothing. It won't help them get to know the real meaning of life (Eccl 12:13). Even if they have arisen to positions of power and authority, it still doesn't matter. But those who are mature – who have grown in the faith – will understand God's will. God's wisdom is hidden in mystery. That doesn't mean that it can't be understood – but it is hidden from those who are not in tune with God, and can easily be understood by those who want to know Him.

But to come to that position requires maturity. The Corinthians had started on the journey, but they still had a long way to go. If they had truly understood *the message of the cross* (1:1:18) then they wouldn't have had all of the problems and issues that Paul is about to deal with in the rest of the letter – let alone those of the division issues that he has already dealt with in chapter 1.

What is the mystery that Paul discusses?

The gospel is the mystery. In other ages it was not revealed to man (Eph 3:4-9; Col 1:26) and at that time, even the angels did not understand it and longed to see it (1 Pet 1:12). The mystery had been kept secret since before the world began (Rom 16:25), but it has now been revealed to us. And Paul describes the mystery for us in 1Tim 3:16:

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:
He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory. (1 Tim 3:16 NIV)

As discussed briefly in the last study, one could hardly conceive of a God who allowed His enemies to put Him to death. The Jews could never conceive of this for the Messiah – and that is one of the reasons they still reject Jesus as the Messiah – but the characteristics of Jesus were shown hidden in “*type*” in the Old Testament. It was shadowy and sketchy, but now is clear. The mystery has been revealed in the gospel.

The Jews foresaw the Messiah in two ways. One was the Kingly Messiah who would come to re-establish the kingdom like it was under David, and the other was the Priestly Messiah. And the two pictures of the Messiah could not be reconciled. A picture of the Messiah who reconciled the two together was given through Melchisedek, yet he comes from nowhere in the Old Testament and disappears just as quick. If we only looked at him through the Old Testament, we would not get the picture. But in the gospel, the Hebrew writer explains Melchisedek for us, and we can clearly see how Jesus brought the Kingdom and the Priesthood together in Himself.

If the Jews had understood this, they would never have crucified Jesus (1:2:8).

How were these things revealed to us?

The Holy Spirit reveals them to us is the answer that Paul gives us. But the real question is *how* the Holy Spirit does this. In the first instance, the church at Corinth had an abundance of miraculous gifts (as we will discuss in later chapters). Of necessity, when Paul discusses the action of the Holy Spirit (HS) in the Corinthian letter, it must be considered in the light of the explicit manifestation that was bestowed upon those who had the gifts (which was given through laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 8:17-18)). The purpose of the gifts was so that the church would be edified (1:14:4-5) and would be guided until God's perfect (complete) revelation was given through the written word (1:13:10). So, the first and most obvious revelation of the mystery through the HS is the gifts confirming God's revelation.

On a second level, the HS guided the writers of the New Testament, and the things that they wrote were not their own words, but the words that God had revealed to them (1:2:13; 1:14:37; 2 Pet 1:21). So, when we read the things that were written by the inspired apostles and prophets, we can know the things of God that have been revealed by the HS.

On a third level, when we are baptised (immersed in water) into Christ, then we are given the HS (Acts 2:38-39) who then dwells in us (Rom 8:9) and He (the HS) interacts with our spirit (Rom 8:16) and helps our understanding (1 Jn 2:20).

Paul even spells this out for us in detail:

“... *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us...*” (1:2:12 NIV).

But the question is, is this Paul speaking as an apostle (and representatively of the other apostles) or is he speaking concerning all who obey God? In the context of the Corinthian church, the first position must be that of those (including the apostles) who had the miraculous gifts, and spoke by inspiration. Those who heard them (and read their writings – including us) knew then the things revealed by the HS.

However the *natural* man – the “*un spiritual*” person doesn’t understand these things. He regards them as foolish (1:2:14).

Paul makes the comparison of how we can know the mind of God with how we can know the mind of another man. The answer is, that we can’t know the mind of anyone else unless the other person reveals it to us. Likewise, we can’t know the mind of God unless it is revealed to us – and the HS has done that through the scripture (Eph 3:4).

When we are spiritual, and have our hearts and minds tuned to God, then (and only then) can we understand the things that God has revealed. When we do, then “... *we have the mind of Christ...*” (1:2:16)