

United in Christ: Overcoming the Challenges of Diversity
Studies in 1 Corinthians
The Message of the Gospel is Truly Wise

Intro: In our studies so far we have seen that the Corinthians were divided because they placed too much emphasis upon the speaking ability of their teachers as the evidence of their wisdom. Paul's response to them was threefold:

1. Paul pointed out that God chose to accomplish our salvation, not by human wisdom, but by that which human wisdom could have never conceived, the preaching of the cross.
2. Paul demonstrated that God made use of the foolish, weak, and the base things of this world so as to eliminate human boasting and cause men to glory in Him and what He has done through Christ.
3. Paul explained that it was these principles that influenced the way he preached among the Corinthians—that the content of his message was Christ and Him crucified, and that his method of delivery was, unlike that of the so-called “wise” men of the Corinthian society, not with persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.

Since Paul has spoken so powerfully against relying upon human wisdom, should one conclude then that there is no real wisdom in the message of the gospel? Should we conclude that there is no wisdom to be gained by believing in the revelation of the apostles of Christ? Paul answers that question in the next section of 1 Corinthians (2:6-16):

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 Corinthians 2:6-16)

(Because of the length of this paragraph, it is probably too long to discuss in a single lesson. So we'll consider its message in two lessons; but I hope we'll not lose the continuity of thought by doing this.)

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 a message that is truly "wise."

(Now, so you will know where I'm going, I want to give you four key points Paul makes in this lengthy paragraph as we think through the text; and then we'll talk about two tonight and Lord willing, two next week.

1. The wisdom of the gospel is of divine not human origin.
2. This divine wisdom was hidden from the wise of this world.
3. This divine wisdom was revealed by the Holy Spirit through Christ's chosen messengers.
4. This wisdom, spoken by the messengers of Christ, is valued only by those who are spiritual or mature.)

Paul begins by saying, "We do speak wisdom..." and then describes that wisdom.

The wisdom of the gospel is of divine not human origin.

The wisdom of the gospel is not of human origin.

It is not of this age"

Paul is saying that the message he preached did not state or package what was considered wise in the Corinthian culture.

It is "not of the rulers of this age, who are passing away"

The message Paul preached did not originate nor was it compatible with the thinking of those who were in positions of power and authority; and Paul hastens to add that they who rule over this world will "pass away" (Paul uses a word which means "to bring to nothing"). Indeed the kingdom of God will at last bring an end to all human power and plans.

The wisdom of the gospel is of divine origin.

It is "God's wisdom"

Paul takes no credit for the message. He is only God's messenger; and because the message comes from God, it is profoundly wise.

It is God's wisdom "in a mystery"

Paul commonly uses this word for what God has held in His secret counsel, but made known by revelation. It is a reminder of the impossibility of man to know it without God making it known. Yet it is also a reminder that God has been pleased to reveal to man what He is doing.

It was "predestined before the ages for our glory"

The message of the gospel contains the plan which God conceived before the creation—"before the ages." It is not an afterthought; but the original purpose of God in creating mankind.

Unlike the self-serving “wise” men in Corinth or the rulers who controlled this world and acted out of their own self-serving purposes, God’s plans and actions were intended to bring about blessing for man—for the glory and exaltation of those who love and serve God.

This divine wisdom was hidden from the wise of this world.

God’s wisdom, Paul says, is *the hidden wisdom...*

That is, it remains unknown by those who do not believe.

This wisdom “none of the rulers of this age understood.”

Those who profess to be wise in human terms did not understand the wisdom of God.

for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

How wise could those people be, who ruling over this world, rejected and crucified the one who made it all?! Even the Lord added his stamp of truth to this fact: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing!” (Lk. 23:34).

And this rejection of God’s Son could be seen as a manifestation of that general lack of understanding that Isaiah assigned to mankind as he spoke of the coming kingdom.

“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.”

One cannot find this quote exactly in this form in the OT; consequently some suggest that Paul is quoting from sources outside the Scripture. But this is not certain; it would not be inappropriate for Paul to combine the thoughts Isaiah’s prophecies of the kingdom Is. 64:4 and 65:17 to make the point he is making.

And the point is, that what God had planned for those who love Him, who wait for Him, was something beyond the scope of man’s present experiences or even what he might conceive in his own mind/heart.

So then Paul wants the Corinthians to recognize that his preaching does contain the wisdom of God, which humans in their wisdom could have never conceived.

How did Paul’s message speak to the Corinthian problem?

The Corinthians had been so focused on their immature definitions of “wisdom,” that they had failed to see the “wisdom” that has been made available to them through the gospel. Since Paul did not use the rhetorical speech that so impressed the Corinthians, they may have not thought Paul so wise. But they were failing to see another kind of wisdom in Paul’s speech that was far more important, namely, the wisdom of God, the revelation of God’s wisdom for man’s salvation and eternal glory—a wisdom that was embodied in the crucifixion of Jesus for their sins.

They were so enamored by the rhetorical skills of the likes of those who become rulers in this world that they had forgotten that those very rulers,

whose “wisdom” they admired so much, were not even wise enough to recognize the Son of God when he came to this world!

These points are yet another reason for the Corinthians to grow up and reject human wisdom as the basis for their preacher comparisons and personal aspirations and embrace the wisdom of the cross which teaches people to humble themselves before God and one another.

What are the implications of Paul’s message for us?

Likewise this paragraph also speaks powerfully to us today.

We live too at the crossroads of the clash of two worlds and two kingdoms—one driven by the power of human wisdom; the other driven by the power of divine wisdom. There is little compatibility between two.

Sometimes we may become enamored by those who have “made it” in the kingdom of Satan and seek to know from them how to get ahead. But in so doing we are mimicking those who will be brought to nothing. Though knowing enough to get themselves to the highest levels of society, they do not know enough to believe in Jesus or direct their lives by His gospel. They reject His wisdom, for their own. We would be foolish to make them and what they say the standard for our conduct.

Instead we need to appreciate the privilege we have to hear the words of God given to us through his servant Paul. We need to embrace God’s message of universal love and humility manifest through the cross.

Such a mindset may not get us ahead in this world; but it is the only path to the eternal kingdom of God.

Conclusion: Let us hear this word from God about His wisdom; and let us use this wisdom as the basis for what we do.