

*The Apostles Speak Wisdom (6-16)**Text*

2:6-16. We speak wisdom, however, among them that are full-grown: yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nought: 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory: 8 which none of the rulers of this world hath known: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory: 9 but as it is written,

Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not,

And which entered not into the heart of man,

Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him.

10 But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. 12 But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words. 14 Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself if judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But he have the mind of Christ.

Commentary

We.—It is important that we keep in mind the antecedent of this pronoun. In 2:1-5, it is clear that Paul is speaking of his own preaching as an inspired apostle. Beginning in verse 6, he includes all of the apostles in the statement, "We speak wisdom." He does not say "we" just to avoid the use of the first person singular. Note II Cor. 10:1 where he uses the expression, "I Paul myself." In the light of the context and the history of Pentecost (Acts 2), this could not possibly refer to all Christians. Only the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on that day. But the people, without miraculous aid, did understand what the Spirit said to them through the apostles. The only illumination they needed to realize that they were sinners of the worst sort was the light that fell on their minds through the inspired

message spoken through the apostle. The force of the facts about the life, death and resurrection of Christ led them to cry out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" It required no operation of the Spirit other than the command issued through the apostles to let them understand that they needed to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins.

Paul, of course, had all the power of the other apostles. It was necessary for him to include all of the apostles in this reference to the manner in which God revealed His wisdom.

Keeping this antecedent in mind will help determine who the "natural man" is and who is meant by the expression, "he that is spiritual." See notes on verses 14-15.

wisdom.—Once again, Paul points out the contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God revealed by Christ through the inspired apostles. The rulers of this world who crucified the Lord of glory were not acting upon the instruction of the wisdom of God. But on the Day of Pentecost, the three thousand who had been deceived by them reversed the decision they had made when they cried out for Jesus to be crucified, and they got themselves baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38-39).

It is evident that man could have understood what God had revealed in the Old Testament concerning the Christ. God evidently intended that His revealed wisdom should guide the thinking of men, not some supposed inner direction of the Spirit.

God's wisdom in a mystery.—"Mystery" in the New Testament refers to that which would have forever remained unknowable if God had not revealed it through the inspired apostles and prophets. But since it has been revealed, we are not to assume that it takes additional illumination or miraculous effort of the Spirit to enable us to understand it. Paul clearly showed the Ephesians that God had made this mystery known through him, and that the Ephesians could know of his understanding when they read what he had written (Eph. 2:1-4).

A few simple rules will help us when we read the Bible: (1) Scripture must be understood in the light of its context. An important illustration of this is found in I Cor. 2:9. Popular interpretation makes this verse refer to heaven, "things which God prepared for them that loved him." But the context clearly shows that it has to do with the wonderful things revealed for us in the Bible. Scripture is always more helpful when taken in the sense intended by the inspired writers. Context refers to what goes immediately before and what follows immediately after a particular verse. It also suggests the

necessity of keeping the text and its immediate context in line with the whole thought or theme of the book. In studying First Corinthians (or any other book of the Bible) it is well to read the whole book frequently, keeping in mind the progress of thought at all times. Help in doing this will be had by reference to the charts that picture the development of the theme of the book. (2) Some other rules that will help are these: Know who is speaking and to whom the message is spoken. Note carefully the purpose of the statement, the meaning of words, the antecedents of pronouns, and all other grammatical and syntactical matters. (3) A very important rule to remember is this: The New Testament interprets the Old Testament; the epistles, which were written within the framework of the history given in Acts, interprets the gospels; literal language explains the figurative; plain teaching explains the symbolic. (See Carnel, *A Case For Orthodox Theology*, p. 53; The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.) (4) One who seeks to understand the Bible must determine first what the particular passage says and then what is meant by the statement. After this is done one can make application of the verse to the particular problem at hand. (See Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 5; The Macmillan Company, N. Y., 1941).

know.—None of the rulers of the world has known the wisdom of God. Verse 14 states that the natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit of God. But according to verse 12, the inspired apostles did know the things that were graciously given them from God.

The problem involved in these statements hinges on the meaning of the two Greek words which are here translated by the one word "know." The first of these words, which Paul uses in connection with the inability of the natural man and the rulers of the world to know the wisdom of God, means to become aware of through experience or observation. It may also mean to understand. In the light of the context, which of the meanings best fits this passage? Are we to say that the natural or uninspired man cannot understand the message revealed by the Holy Spirit? Some do take this position. But are we to say that God who created man, an intelligent being capable of communicating his thoughts through language, could not speak to His creature in a manner so as to be understood? What is the purpose of God's revealed wisdom if it cannot be understood? But, of course, man by his own experience and observation could never know God's mind. The only way he could know it was by the revelation through the apostles and prophets. See II Pet. 1:17-21; Heb. 1:1-2.

The other word which is translated "know" means to know by mental insight, reflection, or by information being given. The revealed wisdom of God clearly falls into this category. That is why Paul uses this word when he says that the Spirit was given to the apostles that they might know (as a result of information given them by the Holy Spirit) the things that God graciously gave to them.

While it is true that these two words are often used synonymously, it will be enlightening to keep the distinction in mind in studying this chapter. The uninspired man could never have produced the Bible; but an intelligent person can, by using the rules that apply to the understanding and interpretation of all language, understand the Bible.

A good example of the meaning of both of these words is found in John 14:7. Jesus said, "If you had known me, ye would have known my Father." The first word for *know* is the one that means to recognize, to know by experience; the second is the word for *know*, meaning to know by information given. The distinction does not appear in our English translations, but according to the Greek text, what Jesus said was this: "If you had recognized me, you would have known the Father I am revealing to you."

But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God.—The spirit of the world is that spirit of the rulers of this age which resulted from ignorance of God's will. It was the spirit that led them to crucify the Lord of glory. But the Spirit which the inspired apostles had received was the Holy Spirit which Christ promised to them (Acts 1:8) and which they received when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). That is why Paul says, "we (the inspired apostles) received the Spirit (not spirit) from God in order that we might know (by revelation) the things of God."

"The spirit which is from God" surely refers to the Holy Spirit. The word should be capitalized when referring to the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit which is from God" is the same as "the Spirit" referred to in verse 10. There the word is capitalized as it should be.

we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth.—"We" refers to the inspired apostles, not to Christians in general. The apostles did not speak a message taught by human wisdom. It was divinely revealed through the Holy Spirit. See James 3:15-17 for a similar contrast between the reasoning of man and the wisdom from God.

combining spiritual things with spiritual.—There are many different

interpretations of this statement. The American Standard Version supplies "words" in italics since it is not in the Greek in this phrase. It is in the immediate context and may be correctly implied in this phrase also. In the footnote, they suggest this possibility: "interpreting spiritual things to spiritual men." While there is merit in the reading in the body of the text, there is little merit to the view given by the footnote. Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century, suggest that the spiritual things revealed through the apostles are combined with the spiritual things already revealed through the testimonies, types, and demonstrations of the Old Testament. He points out that we are utterly dependent on revelation to understand God's mysteries. It is easy to see that Paul in this very chapter combines the revelation given by him with that which had been written. See verse 9. Those who hold to the "verbal inspiration" theory will find little support in the Greek text of this verse. It does, however, clearly support the view of revelation through the inspired apostles.

Now the natural man.—Traditional theology makes it difficult for some to see what Paul is saying here. It is contended that no unsaved man can understand the deep things of the Word of God, and that even dedicated scholars are unable to use the Word successfully without illumination of the mind provided miraculously by the Holy Spirit. (See Wuest, *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament*, p. 149; Moody Press, Chicago). If this is true, how can the believer be saved through the message of the cross which Paul preached? (I Cor. 1:21) While the natural man can not know the mysteries of God's wisdom by his own reasoning, he can understand the word revealed by the inspired apostles. It would be foolishness indeed if none but the inspired could understand the message after it had been revealed. If it takes miraculous illumination on the part of man to understand the Bible, then the Bible itself is superfluous.

The word translated "natural man" refers to man as an earthly being limited in his knowledge to what he can know by his own mental powers. It contemplates man as an earthly creature without miraculous powers given through the Holy Spirit. It is man by himself without the aid of divine revelation.

The context makes it clear that the natural man is the same as the rulers of this world mentioned in verse 6, that is, man to whom the mysteries of God had not been revealed. The natural man is contrasted with the "one that is spiritual." The "one who is spiritual" is the inspired apostle or prophet. The natural man, then, is the uninspired man.

It should be remembered that while in chapter 2 the contrast is between natural and spiritual, in chapter 3 it is between carnal and spiritual. In chapter 2 the inspired apostle is contrasted with the natural man such as the rulers of this age. In chapter 3, however, the contrast is between the one who is undeveloped in Christian character and what they should have been as ones whose lives were dominated by the message revealed through the Holy Spirit. In this connection see Gal. 5:16-24 where the thought of being led by what is spirit is contrasted with what is flesh. The works of the flesh are contrasted with the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit is the Christian character of the one who permits his spirit to respond to the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

foolishness to him.—See 1:25. Foolish things have no meaning. Likewise, the mysteries of God before they were revealed to man had no meaning to him.

he cannot know them.—Paul has explained in 11-12 that no man can know what is in the mind of another except, of course, as it is told to him. So man cannot know what is in the mind of God except through the revelation by the Spirit through the apostles and prophets.

spiritually judged.—The word “judged” in this verse means to sift, examine, investigate. This particular Greek word translated “judge” in our Bible is found in the following verses of First Corinthians: 2:14, 15; 4:3, 4; 9:3; 10:25, 27; 14:24. It will be rewarding to read these in the light of the above definition.

The word is often used to describe a preliminary examination or investigation before a decision is rendered. Such investigations may have to do with (1) sifting evidence to be presented at a trial, or (2) investigating the qualifications of one who is to be a witness or who is to sit as judge. It is the word used to describe Pilate's preliminary investigation of charges against Jesus before he pronounced Him innocent. It is used to denote the action of the inspired apostle who by the Holy Spirit investigated the “deep things of God” and then spoke in language that could be understood by their hearers.

he himself is judged of no man.—Since the word “judge” is used with reference to the investigation of one's qualifications for a task, it is appropriate to say of the “one who is spiritual” that he is “judged” of no man. Of course, God passed on the qualifications of His apostles. The Corinthians were not qualified to pass on Paul's fitness to be an apostle, for only the Lord could do that (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

The “spiritual one” is judged by no man. The context makes it clear that this is the inspired apostle, but this does not mean that the

apostles were above criticism for mistakes in personal conduct. Peter's action at Antioch for which he was rebuked by Paul answers this objection (Gal. 2:11-12). Paul does not say that the world cannot judge the actions of a Christian. Jesus said that men were to see their good works and glorify the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). The investigation, however, of the fitness of one to be an apostle of Christ is not the right of any man; only the Lord can do this (I Cor. 4:3-4). Thus the inspired apostle, by the power of the Holy Spirit, investigates the deep things of God before he speaks them in Spirit-taught words, but no man passes on his qualifications to be an apostle.

For who hath known the mind of the Lord?—This is the same word for "know" as in verse 14. The question is: Who, by his own reasoning power and without revelation from God, has known the mind of the Lord? This is the same thing that was said of the "natural man" and the rulers of this world. No man could know the mind of the Lord apart from His revealed message. This same thing was made clear in verses 10-13 which deal with the revelation of God's message through the inspired apostles.

But we have the mind of Christ.—"We" has the same antecedent throughout this section (6-16). It cannot refer to all Christians; context requires us to relate it to the inspired apostles and prophets. They had the "mind of Christ" because the Holy Spirit revealed it to them (see verses 10 and 12). How thankful we should be that God created us with a mind capable of reading and understanding the message revealed through the inspired apostles of Christ.

Summary

Chapter two continues the contrast of worldly wisdom and the word of the cross. It presents Paul's own explanation of the nature of his preaching in Corinth. He came to Corinth just after his experience in preaching "Jesus and the resurrection" in Athens. Although Corinth was a city of the worldly wise, he was determined to do exactly what he had been doing from the moment of his conversion: preach Christ and Him crucified. This is what he did at Damascus, at Athens, at Corinth, and ultimately at Rome, for even there he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

The Greeks loved to indulge in long and involved argumentation, not so much with a view to discovering truth as with a display of oratorical skill that enabled them to win the argument. Paul, however, was not concerned with their methods; he was convinced that he had the revealed truth of the gospel and was content to preach that alone. He freely recognized his own weakness and depended on God for the

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revealed wisdom he preached. Like a slave who feared to disobey his master, Paul preached the word of the cross with fear and trembling lest he fail to do so in a manner pleasing to his Lord. His message was not in persuasive words of the wisdom of man, but in the truth of the gospel which was supported by the divine approval of the miracles that accompanied the preaching of the apostles. Thus the faith of the Corinthians had a solid foundation in the revealed wisdom of God rather than a sandy foundation of human speculation.

Lest some might be led to assume that the message of the cross was inferior to worldly wisdom, Paul explained that it was wisdom among the mature, implying a state of arrested mental development on the part of those who followed the wisdom of that age. No one who has followed the cogent reasoning of Paul in his epistles can doubt the validity of his claim. The conduct of the rulers of the world and the quotations from the Scriptures prove his statement. The mysteries of God which were hidden through the ages would have remained hidden forever if God had not chosen to reveal them through the inspired apostles and prophets. Just as one man can not know the mind of another except he be told, so man cannot know the mind of God except through the revelation God made by the Holy Spirit. The apostles spoke the truth of the gospel in clear and understandable language. The salvation of the sinner depends on his believing that message.

The rules of interpreting all language apply to the Bible also. Man does not need to have some miraculous illumination of his mind by the Holy Spirit to read and understand the Bible any more than a book of history. God created man with a mind which is capable of understanding and responding to His directives for life here and hereafter as they are given in the Bible. While there are things in the Bible that will challenge the greatest of minds, it is evident that it can be understood and followed as easily as Adam understood what God told him to do in the Garden. We cannot safely claim that the sin of Adam so corrupted the mind of man that he cannot understand and obey the truth God revealed in the Bible.

What then is the natural man? Paul's own example of what he meant by this phrase is the reference to the rulers of the world who crucified the Lord of glory. They had no means of knowing about God's wisdom until it has been revealed by the inspired servants of God. Natural man is simply man left to himself without the benefit of inspired revelation to direct his way of life. The natural man is contrasted with the inspired apostles. God selected them. No man

passed on their qualifications to be apostles of Christ. And because they were the inspired apostles of Christ, Paul could say "we have the mind of Christ."

In this way Paul led to the subject matter of the third chapter. He is now ready to rebuke them for failure to heed what he had taught them; the result of that failure was the sin of division.

Questions

1. What is the relation between the subject matter of this chapter and chapter one?
2. How does Paul's work at Corinth prove the same point which he illustrates by calling attention to the status of the Corinthians in chapter one?
3. Why does Paul address them as "brethren" as he begins this chapter?
4. What is known about the history of Paul's first ministry at Corinth?
5. What had been doing immediately prior to his coming to Corinth?
6. What can be said to refute the charge that Paul failed at Athens?
7. Why did Paul say that he did not come "with excellency of speech"?
8. What did he mean by his remark about "rude of speech"?
9. What is known about the academic training of Paul before he was commissioned by Christ as the apostle to the Gentiles?
10. In what two ways may we understand the expression "testimony of God"? Explain how each may fit the context of verse 1.
11. How explain Paul's determination "not to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified" in the light of his educational background?
12. On what was his determination based?
13. What evidence is there to prove that Paul, from the beginning of his ministry to its close without exception, preached Christ and him crucified?
14. In what way does the preaching of Paul stand in striking contrast to the method of the Greek teachers of his day?
15. How did Paul regard his responsibility in relation to "the mysteries of God"?
16. Why did Paul mention his weakness? What did he mean by it?
17. What is known of the dangers Paul faced in his ministry?
18. Is there any evidence to support the theory that he feared for his personal safety?

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19. What assurance did the Lord give him in face of danger?
20. What is a probable meaning of his remark about "fear and trembling"?
21. What kind of foundation for faith did Paul present to the Corinthians?
22. How did God demonstrate that the message of the apostles was true?
23. Why is it impossible for men to have produced the revelation of God's mind which we have in the Bible?
24. In what way was the world ready for this final revelation of God's will which was preached by the inspired apostles?
25. How did Paul prepare his readers for the discussion of wisdom for the mature?
26. What is the antecedent of the pronoun "we" in verses 6-16?
27. Why is it impossible to refer it to all Christians?
28. What is implied by the statement, "Wisdom among the fullgrown?"
29. How is this wisdom contrasted with the wisdom of the world or of the rulers of this age?
30. What evidence that uninspired man without the aid of miraculous illumination can and did understand the message revealed by the Holy Spirit and spoken through the apostles?
31. What is meant in the New Testament by "mystery"?
32. What proof is given in Ephesians that the ordinary reader can understand the Bible?
33. What are some rules that will help us to understand the Bible? See Eph. 3:4; Acts 17:11; Psalms 1:2; II Tim. 3:14.
34. What is meant by the two Greek words translated "know" in this chapter?
35. In what connection does Paul use each of them?
36. How do the remarks of Jesus in John 14:7 illustrate the meaning of these two words?
37. To whom did Paul refer when he said "We received the Spirit which is from God"?
38. When should the word "spirit" be capitalized in the Bible?
39. What bearing does this have on the meaning of verse 12?
40. What enabled the apostles to speak "the things of God"?
41. What is the source of the words spoken by the apostles?
42. What does James say about the two-fold classification of wisdom?
43. What bearing does this have on Paul's statement to the Corinthians?

CHAPTER TWO

44. How did Chrysostom understand the statement, "combining spiritual things with spiritual"?
45. What other explanations are there for this expression?
46. What bearing does it have on "verbal inspiration"?
47. What does traditional theology say about "the natural man"?
48. With what does Paul contrast the "natural man"?
49. What is the "natural man"?
50. What evidence that Paul means the same thing by "natural man" and "the rulers of this age"?
51. Who is the "one who is spiritual"?
52. What is the difference between the way the word "spiritual" is used in chapter two and in chapter three?
53. Why are the "mysteries of God" foolishness to the natural man?
54. What is meant by the expression, "he cannot know them"?
55. What is the definition of the word "know" in this expression?
56. What is meant by "judged" in verses 14 and 15?
57. How can this word be used to explain the apostles' ability to reveal the truth of the gospel?
58. What is meant by saying that the one who is spiritual is judged of no man?
59. Is this world capable of judging the acts of Christians?
60. To whom does Paul refer when he says "we have the mind of Christ"?

For Discussion

1. What place should education have in training today's ministers?
2. What place should Bible training have in preparing men to preach?
3. What would happen if all preachers today limited their preaching to the subject, "Christ and him crucified"?