

## Chapter Two

### THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION

(2:1-16)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why is revelation a problem? Why is it a problem to Christians?
2. How is the apostolic message different from the philosophies of men?
3. What vehicle or instrumentality did God utilize in revealing the apostolic message to man?
4. Why can't man discover God's will and plan for his life?
5. How spiritual does a person have to be to understand the apostolic message?

#### SECTION 1

#### Unsophisticated but Dynamic (2:1-5)

**2** When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup>For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; <sup>4</sup>and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup>that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

**2:1-2 Plain Words:** The Greek love for sophisticated philippic and techniques of argumentation colored their concept of the worth of the apostolic gospel. The heroes of the Greek culture were the philosophers who spent all their time debating philosophies (see Acts 17:16-21) and displaying their expertise in eloquent use of language. "The speaking was the thing" with them—not the reality of what was being said. William Barclay says:

The Greek sought wisdom. Originally the Greek word *sophist* meant *a wise man* in the good sense; but it came to mean a man with a clever mind and cunning tongue, a mental acrobat, a man who with glittering and persuasive rhetoric could make the worse appear the better reason. It meant a man who would spend endless hours discussing hair-splitting trifles, a man who

had no real interest in solutions but who simply gloried in the stimulus of "the mental Hike." . . . It is impossible to exaggerate the almost fantastic mastery that the silver-tongued rhetorician held in Greece. Plutarch says, "They made their voices sweet with musical cadences and modulations of tone and echoed resonances." They thought not of what they were saying, but of how they were saying it. Their thought might be poisonous so long as it was enveloped in honeyed words. Philostratus tells us that Adrian, the sophist, had such a reputation in Rome, that when his messenger appeared with a notice that he was to lecture, the senate emptied and even the people at the games abandoned them to flock to hear him.

The Greeks were intoxicated with rhetoric and eloquence. They would look on Paul's preaching of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ in simple, direct words testifying to plain historical facts as crude and uncultured. Paul says literally, "And I coming to you brethren, came not according to over-hanging (high, superior) word or sophistry." Paul might have had the background to have attempted competition with the Greek sophists. He had studied for years from the most famous rabbis of Israel. He knew Greek poetry (cf. Acts 17:28). But he was not interested in eloquence.

Paul determined to speak nothing among the Greeks but Jesus Christ and this One having been crucified. He could do nothing else and be true to the gospel. That is what the gospel is—the redemptive work of Christ. The gospel is not what man must do—the gospel is what God, in Christ, has done. We know Paul included the resurrection of Christ in his preaching to the Greeks for we have a record of his having done so (cf. Acts 17:30-31; I Cor. 15:1-11). Paul preached that the fulfillment of the Old Testament was the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplishing atonement and reconciliation of man to God, available through faith and baptism into Christ. Paul had no time for irrelevancies; not even for the peripheral things of life. There was only one issue for him and he determined everywhere he went, to everyone who would give him attention, he would preach the facts of the good news—Christ crucified and risen again commanding all men everywhere to repent. Without this everything else in life *is* irrelevant (see I Cor. 15:12-19). Without this all of life is *bad* news. Without this all mankind is guilty before the Absolute God and sentenced to eternal damnation. No wonder Paul had no time to talk about innane and trivial matters. Not Christianity, but

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Christ; not a system, but the Savior; every Christian who would be faithful to God must live by the same determination (cf. Col. 1:27-29).

Unlike many modern theologians who want to present Christ as a great teacher, the founder of a great religion, or a great example of humanity at its apex of goodness, Paul preached Christ *crucified*. The Greek word Paul uses, *estauromenon*, is a perfect participle, meaning a thing completed with a continuing result. Christ's death on the cross is unlike all other deaths in this world—it continues to be efficacious for all who will make it theirs by faith.

**2:3-5 Powerful Witness:** When Paul went to Corinth, he was vividly aware of his weaknesses as a human being, (see Acts 18:9). His weaknesses would include his "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7), his poor personal appearance (II Cor. 10:10) whatever that was, and what the Corinthians thought was an inadequate speaking ability (II Cor. 10:10). The power of Paul's address before the philosophers in Athens would seem to refute the accusation of the Corinthians about his inability to speak. That sermon on Mar's Hill is irrefutable in its logic, clear in its simplicity, and persuasive in its appeal. If Paul had any inability in speaking it must have been some physical impairment in his voice.

What were the fears and tremblings Paul had? He certainly did not fear for his life. Neither did he fear that the gospel was inadequate. Paul was apparently overwhelmed, at his first glimpse of Corinth, and the enormity of the task before him, (Acts 18:9). He was afraid people, with their prejudices and superficialities, would focus on his human inadequacies and not give ear to his message in which the power resided to transform them.

Realizing this, says Paul, "my word (Gr. *logos*) and my message (Gr. *kerugma*) were not in *enticing* (Gr. *peithos*, sometimes translated *plausible* or *persuasive*) words of human *sophistry* (Gr. *sophias*)." Paul did not seek to entice, trick, seduce, or "psych" people into faith in Christ. He would not be a "peddler" of God's Word (II Cor. 2:17). He would not use disgraceful and underhanded ways, practice cunning, or tamper with God's Word (II Cor. 4:2). He openly stated the truth. And that truth was Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. There were no public relations "advance-men," paid exorbitant salaries to create an "image" for Paul. There were no huge musical ensembles, with their amplifiers, microphones, spot-lighting, and staging accompanying Paul (desensitizing men's minds so they could not *think* about what Paul was preaching).

His message was fact, not sophistry. Paul uses a number of Greek words in this text which emphasizes the legal and scientific nature of

his message. Paul's message is historical and demonstrable as opposed to the specious theories and equivocations of the philosophers and sophists. For example, the Greek word *apodeixe* (translated *demonstration* 2:4) is a word used to describe the examining of witnesses in trials testifying to eyewitnessed evidence, or to describe the testing of ore in a crucible to provide evidence of its identity. Not only was Paul's message based on eyewitnessed proofs of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see I Cor. 15:1ff.), it was also confirmed by the powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit in the miracles done by Paul himself (see II Cor. 12:12).

God never intended that man's faith should be based on speculations and feelings. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not speculation—it is history. What we believe about God and his promises, we believe on the basis of these supernatural deeds done in time and space, in this historical frame in which we exist. The Christian's faith rests on the power of God—and that is not a power about which we theorize, but a power demonstrated in history!

All God's word needs is to be preached. It will produce faith in the mind and heart of anyone who will allow it (cf. Rom. 10:1ff.). The word of God does not need the sophistries of psychology, theology, philosophy or politics to make it relevant and powerful. It has power in itself. It is a "living seed" and will produce of itself (see Mark 4:26-29; Isa. 55:10-11). It simply needs to be sown.

## SECTION 2

### Undiscoverable but Understandable (2:6-16)

6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him,”

10 God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is

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in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

<sup>14</sup>The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup>The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. <sup>16</sup>“For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

**2:6-8 Perfected:** The understanding of this whole chapter hinges upon two major premises: (1) clearly, the antecedent to the repeated pronoun “we” and “us” all the way through this chapter is Paul and the other supernaturally endowed apostles, the only persons Christ ever said would be “led into all truth” (cf. Jn. 16:13); (2) contextually, the subject is divinely *revealed* truth as opposed to the limits of finite knowledge. The context is *not* dealing with different levels of understanding or even with ability to comprehend. It is dealing with the impossibility of knowing the mind of God until God decides to reveal His mind to certain individuals so they might pass it on through human language (words). Whatever Paul is saying, it must conform to these two fundamental rules of understanding what someone else has written.

Notice the clear indication that Paul is speaking of the *revelational* aspect of the apostolic message of the cross by the continuity of the antecedent:

- a. “When I came to you . . .” (2:1)
- b. “For I decided to know . . .” (2:2)
- c. “And I was with you . . .” (2:3)
- d. “. . . and my message . . .” (2:3)
- e. “. . . Yet among the mature we do impart . . .” (2:6)
- f. “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom . . .” (2:7)
- g. “God has revealed to us through the Spirit . . .” (2:10)
- h. “Now we have received. . . .” (2:12)
- i. “. . . that we might understand . . .” (2:12)
- j. “And we impart this in words. . . .” (2:13)
- k. “But we have the mind of Christ” (2:16)

Paul's shift from the first person to the third person means only that he is including the other apostles as those who have received the "mind of Christ" by revelation—it does not include all Christians.

Who are the "mature"? The Greek word used in verse 6 is *teleios*, and is often translated, *perfect*, or, *whole*. Lenski says, "*teleios* is the one who has reached the goal. The context invariably determines the goal referred to and the sense in which the term is employed. The present context speaks of only two classes of people: such as accept the gospel in faith and such as spurn the gospel and prefer their own wisdom. No reference has been made to undeveloped Christians."

We believe the context forces us to look back to I Corinthians 1:18-25 for the definition of the "mature ones." The *mature* are those who receive the gospel message in honest, virtuous, unbiased and logical minds. They accept the message as the revelation of God on the basis of the evidence presented. The *immature* are those who are prejudiced and dishonest and who deliberately refuse to acknowledge that there is an Absolute Being existing outside the empirical knowledge of this world who may *reveal* knowledge man may not otherwise discover by his own human resources.

The *immature* are:

- a. "... like children sitting in the market places. . . ." (Matt. 11:16-19)
- b. "the wise and understanding" (Matt. 11:25-30)
- c. "... those who receive glory from one another . . ." (John 5:44)
- d. those in whom the word of Christ finds no place (John 8:37)
- e. those who cannot bear to hear Christ's word (John 8:43-47)
- f. those who say, "We see . . ." (John 9:35-41)
- g. those who love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:37-43)
- h. those who think that the Deity is like gold, or silver. . . . a representation by the art and imagination of man (Acts 17:22-23)
- i. those who claim to be wise and exchange glory of the immortal God for images. . . . who exchange the truth of God for a lie. . . . who do not see fit to acknowledge God (Rom. 1:18-32)
- j. those who refuse to love the truth . . . those who do not believe the truth but take pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess. 2:9-12)
- k. those who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at the truth (II Tim. 3:6-7)
- l. those who deliberately ignore the facts (II Peter 3:1-7)

The *mature* are:

- a. those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15)

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- b. those who do what is true and come to the light (John 3:21)
- c. those who are babes and are willing to take Christ's yoke upon them and learn of him (Matt. 11:25-30)
- d. those who acknowledge they are blind without the apostolic revelation (John 9:39-41)
- e. those willing to be guided by divine revelation (Acts 8:31)
- f. those who accept the apostolic message of the cross as the revelation of God for salvation (I Cor. 1:18-25)
- g. those who accept the word of the apostles as the word of God revealed for salvation (I Thess. 2:13)

When the gospel message of the cross and the apostolic message explaining the doctrine of the cross (and resurrection) is proclaimed, those with honest and good hearts will accept it as a revelation—something man could not know without God telling him. The revelation of God concerning eternal life is totally outside the experience of mortal man. It is not a wisdom of this age nor of any of the greatest human minds of this age. All man can know on his own is that in his present existence everything is passing away, even man himself. Man may know from the creation around him that there is an Eternal Deity (cf. Rom. 1:18-22). Man may know from his conscience that he incurs guilt and deserves judgment. But man *cannot* know from anything within him or around him that God atoned for his guilt in the death of Christ and that salvation may be his by faithful covenant relationship to Christ. That is known only by *revelation!*

The apostles *impart* (Gr. *laloumen*, speak) a secret and hidden wisdom of God. Actually the Greek word translated *secret* is *mysterio* which would be literally, *mystery*. A mystery was *not* something that could not be explained or understood, but something unrevealed and unknown. A mystery, in the New Testament usage of the word, could be known when it was revealed. Paul's use of the word *mystery* may be seen in Ephesians 1:1-23; Colossians 1:24-29; Romans 16:25-27. For man to know the *mystery* of God's will for salvation requires only that the apostles (who have the mind of Christ by supernatural gift) reveal it in human language. It does not require some additional illumination or miraculous empowering of our minds to understand it.

God speaks his eternal wisdom (his plan of redemption and salvation) through human messengers, in human language. God is certainly capable of making himself understood in human language. All that is needed for man to understand God is that God, by signs and wonders, delineate and authenticate those who are his chosen messengers, and that man listen with an honest and unbiased mind.

None of the rulers of this world understood this. Actually, the Greek word *egnoken* may be translated either *known* or *understood*. The proper translation, according to the context, would be *known*. It is something they refused to know because they refused to surrender to the fact that God *revealed* himself *incarnately* in Jesus Christ. They did *not want* to know it. They *chose* to be ignorant (cf. Luke 23:34; John 15:21; Acts 3:17; 13:27; 17:30; Eph. 4:18; I Tim. 1:13). Had they wanted to know this hidden wisdom of God they could have known it because God revealed it in his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Many others knew it. Had the rulers been *willing* to know it, they *would* have known it and would not have crucified the Lord of glory (cf. John 7:17). T. R. Applebury puts it succinctly: "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 creatures in a manner so as to 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."

**2:9-11 Private:** God predicted his redemptive promises to the human race as far back as the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15), but the exact manner in which it would be accomplished was kept *private* in his own mind until he revealed it in Christ and subsequently through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Until God decided to let it be known, no human being could know it.

Verse 9 does *not* refer to man's future state in heaven. It refers to the apostolic message of redemption through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. That divine program was not conceived by man. It never occurred to man that God would save him by grace. That is evidenced by all the religions of the world, except Christianity, attempting to attain reconciliation with God through works. Man, in his pride and arrogance, refuses to acknowledge he must be saved by grace. He could never even imagine the way God would accomplish salvation. If God had chosen to keep his redemptive plan privately hidden in his own mind forever, man would never have discovered it with his own finite and limited human knowledge.

But God chose to reveal his redemptive program to the whole world through the apostles ("us," v. 10) through his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, but he is the same person as the Father and the Son. Jesus plainly declared that he and the Holy Spirit were one and the same person (see John 14:15-23).



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The Holy Spirit of God knows everything God knows—even the deepest recesses of God’s mind and heart. Everything God wanted to be revealed concerning his prepared redemption the Holy Spirit was fully capable of revealing. Therefore, Paul is saying, everything we apostles have declared to you to be God’s redemptive plan is all there is. Men do not need to expect any revelation of God’s redemptive program beyond what the apostles have written! There is no “latter day revelation” to be expected. Salvation is found by reading, believing and obeying the apostolic doctrine—not in some subjective, extra-Biblical, experience. What the apostles wrote is everything the Spirit searched from the Father’s mind—even the *depths*.

One person can never know the mind of another person unless that person communicates his mind. Minds really never communicate until they do so by words (language). Events and deeds cannot bring about the personal encounter which the genius of language alone accomplishes. By means of the sense of hearing, as the receiver of verbal communication, one mind can make contact with the mental world of another mind and can be influenced by that inaccessible and mysterious realm of thought. But until one person decides to tell another person what is on his mind, his thoughts are inaccessible to everyone but his own spirit. This is what Paul is saying about God’s mind in verse 11. Without the voluntary communication (that is, without revelation) of one person’s thoughts to another by words, there is an impenetrable boundary to personal encounter. The mind of a man sitting next to you may be quite inaccessible to you, while at that very moment a friend some thousand miles away may be allowing you, by means of a letter, to learn something of what is beyond this boundary. The act of crossing this boundary (through a revelation in words) is one of the most remarkable phenomena of our experience.

No one but the Spirit of God could know what was on God’s mind. God chose to cross that boundary for man so he gave his Spirit to the apostles who spoke the mind of God in human words.

**2:12-13 Published:** One of the big problems with this Corinthian church had to do with Paul’s presentation of the gospel. Apparently, his presentation did not compare favorably with the eloquence of the philosophers and “preachers” of the pagan mystery cults in cosmopolitan Corinth. Some Christians in the church were probably being tempted to turn away from the gospel and classify it as not divine because it was not colored by the sophistries and verbiage of the silver-tongued orators of Greece. It just did not sound divine. It did not thrill them emotionally—it was not artistic—it was not entertaining.

The apostles received the Spirit which is from God so they might know the mind of God and Christ. Christ promised them the Holy Spirit for this purpose (see John, chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17, and 20:22). They claimed to be speaking by the direct inspiration or revelation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:14-21; I Cor. 2:12-13; II Peter 1:16-21). Their claims to divine inspiration or revelation were authenticated by the signs and wonders done by their hands (cf. II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4). No one but the apostles were promised this revelation of the mind of Christ as his *direct* agents to communicate it to the rest of mankind. The apostle John makes it clear that whoever listens to the apostles listens to God, and whoever does not listen to the apostles does not listen to God (I John 4:1-6). The only possible way to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error is to accept the teachings of the apostles as the final and completed teaching from God!

The Bible leaves us in no doubt whatever that the vehicle of revelation is language (words). The construction of the Greek sentence in verse 13 emphasizes *words* as the vehicle of imparting God's mind to the world. The sentence reads literally, "which things we speak, not in teaching of human wisdom words, but in teaching of the Holy Spirit." Paul, in putting *words* at the end of the phrase, emphasizes that the agency of apostolic revelation is not in emotions, feelings or any other subjective experience, but in human language. Language is versatile. It is unique in the reception and transmission of knowledge. It is the only means which possesses such potentiality. Mystical or subjective communication, in which the intellect is in abeyance and the object of the participant is to merge himself by a non-verbal process in the Godhead, is excluded by a word often on the lips of the writers of the Old Testament. The word is *shema*, translated "to hear," and signifies not only to hear, but "to understand" and even "to obey" what is said. There are literally thousands of references in both Old Testament and New Testament representing God as "speaking" *words* (cf. Exod. 20:1; Deut. 1:6; Ps. 33:9; Jer. 7:13; 14:14; John 6:63; Matt. 24:35; John 17:14, 17). Language is the only conceivable means of communicating non-empirical places, things or concepts. It has the ability to cross dimensional limits of time and space and communicate by verbal deputies (figures of speech, analogies, etc.) the non-experienceable.

So the apostles spoke the mind of God and Christ in human words, but not in human teachings. There is a difference in the two! The devil is able to take human words and proclaim demonic teaching (see James 3:13-18). The apostles were taught what was on God's

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mind about redemption by the Spirit of God in human language. They, in turn, teach all who will listen to them in human language also. When a man listens to the teaching of the apostles and obeys it, he is being taught by the Holy Spirit of God. If the apostles were "led into *all* truth" (see John 16:13) and if the faith is "once for all time delivered unto the saints" (see Jude 3), then there is nothing more the Holy Spirit intends to say to mankind (this side of heaven) about redemption. The apostles have said it all!

Verse 13 reads literally, ". . . with spiritual things, spiritual things comparing . . ." The RSV translation which reads, ". . . interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit," is not a good translation. Paul is not dealing with those *receiving* the apostolic message—he is dealing with those *giving* the apostolic message. This is Paul's way of saying here that the apostles spoke the revelation of the Spirit ("spiritual things") in *terms* or words ("comparables") which the Spirit directed them to use. In other words, the apostles spoke and wrote the very message, in the very terminology, the Spirit of God desired it to be written. As Peter explained it, "men spoke as they were *borne along* by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20-21). The Greek word *sunkrinontes* is translated *comparing* but means, more precisely, "combining, fitly joining together." It means "to adapt the language to the subject." This does *not* mean that the Holy Spirit spoke to the apostles in some "unknown tongue" or that the Bible is in some heavenly language that cannot be understood by the same rules of human language used in all other communications. It simply means that the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in selecting exactly the right words in the Greek language (for the New Testament) to communicate exactly the mind of God concerning redemption.

**2:14-16 Privileged:** Only the apostles (in the New Testament) were privileged to receive the mind of God through the Holy Spirit. And they received it as a gift from God because *no man* can know the mind of God unless God decides to give it. The natural man may know God's mind only if he is "borne along by the Spirit" (II Peter 1:20-21) because "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man."

The Greek word *psychikos* is translated *unspiritual* in the RSV, but means the *physical* man, i.e., the natural man without the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. The natural man, limited to natural faculties, cannot know the will of God unless it is revealed to him by the Spirit. God's will for man's salvation must be revealed before any man can know it. This is precisely what Paul has already said: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of *what* (the revealed

message) *we* (the apostles) preach to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21). It certainly does *not* mean every human being must have his mind illuminated *separately* from the apostolic word before he can understand the Bible.

There is no need for extra-Biblical illumination or revelation for man today. As a matter of fact, the New Testament clearly teaches that a cessation of the miraculous gifts of prophecy and discerning prophecy, etc., would come soon after the first generation of Christians passed away (see our comments on I Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, 14).

The Greek words *ou dunatai gnonai*, in verse 14, mean literally that the physical man *is not able to know* (unless the Spirit of God reveals) the mind of God. Until God's Spirit reveals God's mind, the physical man is like a *moron* (Gr. *moria*, foolishness)—he is unable to know. God's redemptive work in the world, without the Spirit's revelation of God's mind about redemption, is folly (or moronic) to the physical man. This may be illustrated by all the ancient (and modern) pagan attempts to explain history and nature without the propositional revelation (the Bible) of God. One poet said of history without divine revelation, ". . . it is a tale told by idiots, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. . . ." Ancient philosophers grew cynical, depressed and despairing when they tried to explain life without a direct, spoken revelation from God.

But with God's Spirit searching the deep things of God's mind and revealing them as "gifts" through the apostles, everything necessary for the redemption and salvation of man becomes discernable. Nothing really makes sense in this world without the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without that, it would all be vanity (see Ecclesiastes). The physical man is not able to discover by investigation (Gr. *anakrinetai*, discern, critique) the deep things of God because they are discovered (Gr. *anakrinetai*, discerned) by God's spirit. Verses 14-16 and verses 11-13 mean exactly the same thing—" . . . So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we (apostles) have received not the spirit of the world (physical), but the Spirit which is from God, that we (apostles) might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." Paul, in verses 14-16, is simply restating what he said in verses 11-13.

The Spirit-filled one (Gr. *pneumatikos*), the *apostle* (remember the continuity of antecedents) discerns and discriminates *what* the mind of God is and *how* God wants it taught, and teaches all things as God's Spirit chooses to reveal them. The apostles, borne along by the Spirit of God, examined and discerned the deep things of the mind of God and then spoke them in language that could be understood by the human mind.

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The Spirit-filled apostles were, in their capacity as *revealers* of God's word, not to be judged by any one about the veracity of their message. This would not apply to the actions or life-style of the apostles. But when it came to what they preached, no one could say it was not from God. The apostolic message became the touchstone by which all other preaching was judged. The apostles proved they alone revealed the mind of the Spirit by the miracles they wrought. It was the miraculous baptism in the Holy Spirit that endowed the apostles to determine whether any teaching was from God or not (see I John 4:1-6). The man of the Spirit, the apostle (not the Christian), was not to be contradicted or disobeyed when he spoke God's revealed mind. In the first century, before the New Testament revelation reached its completion in written form, only an apostle (or someone upon whom the apostles had laid hands) could judge whether a purported "revelation" was a God-given revelation or not. Now that we have the completed revelation of God in written form, all truth purporting to be from God is to be tested as to its conformity by the written revelation of the apostles.

In verse 16 Paul summarizes this whole discussion of the problem of revelation versus the wisdom of the world. The RSV translates the first sentence, "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to *instruct* him? Actually, the word *instruct* is a translation of the Greek word *sumbibase*. That is the only place in the New Testament where *sumbibase* is translated *instruct*. Everywhere else in the New Testament it is translated *knit* (see Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2; 2:19) or *proving* (see Acts 9:22; 16:10). The word *sumbibase* really means, "to understand or know or conclude so as to be *joined* together with God." Thus, Paul is saying, "We inspired apostles so have the mind of God through the revelation of the Spirit that we are united in Him teaching His will as no uninspired ("natural") man could ever do." The second sentence of this verse leaves no doubt that Paul's subject here is divine revelation, not spiritual maturity. The Greek is constructed: *hemeis de noun Christou echomen*, literally, "we indeed, the mind of Christ are having." The syntax puts strong emphasis on *we* (the apostles). That is the subject—what the *apostles* have as a supernatural gift and *not* what every Christian has by faith.

Now it should be clear to even the most cursory reader of this letter to the Corinthian church why Paul deals with this subject of apostolic revelation at the very outset of the letter. He must establish beyond contradiction the source of his authority. He is going to have to deal with very sensitive and controversial issues in both the corporate life of the church and the private lives of its members.

What he will say *must* be accepted as direct revelation from the mind of God to the church and not simply human opinion. Divine revelation is the only absolute wisdom, and the deeply spiritual problems besetting the Corinthian church will not be solved with anything less.

### APPLICATIONS:

1. The apostolic message was demonstrated to be the mind of the Holy Spirit. The written apostolic message in the books of the New Testament is as true, as authentic, as powerful now as it was then. It needs no further demonstrations any more than a fact that has been once established in court needs reestablishing (Heb. 2:3-4).

The apostolic message needs to be preached. Edward John Carnell said, "If it is true that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save sinners, have we any right to say that we love sinners if we fail to confront them with this truth? And where can we find a divinely validated account of this truth apart from Scripture? In sum, we can express no higher love to lost humanity than to preach the gospel in the precise form in which God has been pleased to reveal it.

2. If the apostolic message did not need humanly-limited wisdom to make it powerful (relevant) then, it does not need it today. The Gospel is relevant and applicable to all of man's problems today!

In fact, it is the only wisdom that is relevant.

By obeying it we can purify our souls (I Peter 1:22).

By believing and obeying it we can be born anew (I Peter 1:23-25).

By knowing and believing it we can know ourselves as God knows us (Heb. 4:11-13).

By knowing, believing and obeying we can have His Spirit living in us (John 14:23; I John 2:24; 3:24, etc.).

3. If the mind of God, His wisdom for man's salvation, could not be known by human speculation or human sciences then, it never could.

All human religions which do not depend upon the revealed word of God (specifically the apostolic message in the New Testament alone) are powerless and irrelevant.

All human religions and philosophies which contradict or oppose the revealed apostolic message are in opposition to God, because the apostolic message is *all* the mind of God which He has chosen to reveal to the world about salvation.

If ever God wanted man to know anything, God had to tell man—man could not read God's mind. That was true in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament covenant.

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

4. God chose to tell man what He wanted man to know in words—human language. Language (symbols verbalized) makes the communication of minds possible. Without it, communication (at least to the human mind) is impossible. Language makes the imposition of one will upon another possible. Thus, human language makes “personal confrontation” possible. Without it personal relationships are impossible (cf. Helen Keller).

THE WAY WE HAVE A “PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP” WITH GOD IS THROUGH HIS WORD . . . JUST LIKE WE HAVE “PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS” WITH OTHER BEINGS!

Of course, God’s personality is divine, and when you let His personality come into yours through His word, you have a Person in you. Words are “instruments” by which a part of you becomes a resident in me. The Holy Word is an Holy Instrument by which the Holy Spirit becomes a resident in you.

5. God’s redemptive work in the world without the Spirit’s revelation (the apostolic message) is folly to the man limited by physical only.

The man who does not believe the Bible is God’s divine revelation has a very limited knowledge of what life is all about. Eating, drinking, relief from all the pain possible, and vainly hoping not to die is about all he sees in life.

Why was I born?

Why do I work?

Why do I get money and spend it?

Why have children?

Why think?

Why help anyone?

Why even live?

This, in fact, is where many people end it all today when they are taught and believe that there is no divinely revealed message from a Heavenly Father.

6. The apostolic message (the written word of the New Testament) is the final and complete mind of God for man’s salvation (cf. II Tim. 3:16-17). It is all that is needed to make a man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Every preacher, teacher, book, program or lifestyle must be tested by that apostolic revelation. If it does not conform in principle and precept it must not be followed.

## APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why did Paul find it necessary to defend the simplicity of his presentation of Christianity?
2. Could preachers you've heard use more simplicity?
3. Did Paul mean to say he did not want people to exercise their minds and think about Christianity? Is there nothing profound about God and Christ?
4. Did Paul limit his preaching at Corinth to only the details about the crucifixion ("Christ and him crucified")? How do you know?
5. Why can't mankind know the wisdom that comes from God on his own?
6. Is there anything man can know about God from his environment (the world in which he lives)? (See Rom. 1:18ff.) What?
7. Is creation a revelation from God? Does man need the Bible to understand creation? Why?
8. How would you illustrate that no man can know the mind of God unless God reveals it?
9. How do we know those to whom God reveals his mind?
10. Does God continue today to reveal his mind to so-called "prophets"? How do you know?
11. Why did God reveal his mind through the apostles in human words?
12. How are we to understand God's revelation in human words—what rules of interpretation should we use to understand the Bible?
13. Would it be necessary to use different rules of language to interpret a cookbook than to interpret the Bible?
14. Is it impossible to understand the Bible unless the Holy Spirit works directly (and extra-Biblically) on each individual to enlighten him?
15. Is God able to use human language so as to make himself understood by man without extra divine aid? How do you know?
16. Why would Paul deal with the problem of apostolic revelation at the very beginning of his letter to Corinth?
17. Is the problem of apostolic revelation a current problem in Christendom today?
18. Do you believe the New Testament is the final, full and perfect revelation of God to man in all things that pertain to life and godliness?