



Understanding True Wisdom

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

The Source of True Wisdom

- ❑ In verses 1:18-2:5, Paul speaks of “wisdom” in mostly negative ways, because he is usually referring to worldly wisdom. In verses 2:6-16,¹ he speaks of wisdom in mostly positive ways because he is usually referring to God’s wisdom. God is the source of *true* wisdom.²
- ❑ In verses 2:6-16, Paul uses several “not/but” statements to contrast the characteristics of God’s wisdom with worldly wisdom (human wisdom). As we go through this passage, we will complete the table (on page 2) entitled “Characteristics of True Wisdom.”

1. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-7. What is the first “not/but” statement (in verses 6b-7a)?


- ❑ In verse 7, Paul speaks of God’s “secret wisdom” (literally, “wisdom in mystery”). Paul uses the term “mystery” to refer to God’s eternal plan and purpose of redemption, hidden in the past, but now revealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit (*Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:4-6*).

The Means of True Wisdom

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 2:8-13. In these verses, Paul says that God’s wisdom *is not* understood by some (e.g. “the rulers of this age”), but *is* understood by others.



2. *What* is necessary for understanding (2:9-12)? *Why* is this necessary (2:10b-11)?³

 “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (*Romans 11:33, NIV*).

3. What is the “not/but” statement in verse 13? Fill in the table.

- ❑ Paul says that his message (concerning Christ) was not based on human wisdom, but was based on the Holy Spirit’s teaching (2:13). Paul was an apostle and a writer of Scripture, so we would expect him to be taught by the Spirit in a special way.⁴

4. But how does the Holy Spirit teach us today?⁵



¹In verse 6, Paul says that he speaks a “message of wisdom” among the “mature” (τέλειους, *teleiouis*) – that is, those who love God (2:9). In verse 7, he speaks of the “rulers of this age,” which is probably used in a broad sense, including human authorities and the “wise ones” of 1:20, and possibly the spiritual forces behind them. These rulers are “coming to nothing” because they are part of the perishing world (1:18).

²“true” as in real, genuine, soundly based and rightly directed. True wisdom relates to the meaning of life.

³Garland says, “Only God’s Spirit apprehends God’s plans and purposes, and only God’s Spirit can link God and humans together,” Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*, NCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 98.

⁴Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things (John 14:26). Paul experienced the direct revelation of the Lord (Acts 9:3-9). The writers of Scripture were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

⁵The Bible is the record of, and is, the essential special revelation of today. The Spirit enables us to accept and understand the Bible, and apply it to our lives. Also, the Spirit convicts the world of sin (John 16:8).

The Recipients of True Wisdom

❑ Review 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.⁶ According to this passage, the nonbeliever⁷ is limited in his/her willingness and ability to accept and understand the things of God. Why? Because the means of knowing the things of God is the Holy Spirit, who is received through faith.⁸

5. Many talk about “being spiritual.” What is a “spiritual man”⁹ according to this passage? How does one become a “spiritual person?”

❑ Verse 2:16 talks about having “the mind of Christ.” This involves understanding God’s wisdom as revealed by the Spirit, and having Christ-like thoughts (sharing his values and desires) as enabled by the Spirit (*Romans 8:9; Philippians 2:5*). This helps in responding to Paul’s instruction to be “perfectly united in mind and thought” (*1:10*).

Further Thought

6. Christians use “apologetics”¹⁰ to help persuade nonbelievers that Christianity is true (or at least reasonable) using science, history, and philosophy. How effective is apologetics? What are its limitations? Considering today’s passage, what role might apologetics play in a person’s acceptance of Christianity?



Characteristics of True Wisdom

Verse(s)	Not	But
6-7	The wisdom of _____	The wisdom of _____
8-10	What the rulers of this age understood	What God has revealed
12	What the spirit of this world offers	What the Spirit of God gives
13	What is taught by _____	What is taught by _____
14	What human faculties can perceive	What the Spirit enables us to discern

Reflection/Application

- Is it difficult for you to fully accept Christianity? Identify the obstacles to belief in your life. Are you relying on human wisdom alone? Are you willing to acknowledge the spiritual component of understanding truth? Reread this passage, and seek spiritual understanding.
- As a Christian, are you giving proper place to the Spirit’s role in helping you understand truth? Are you relying too much on human wisdom? Pray regularly for the Spirit’s work.

⁶ What does verse 15 mean? The verb *ανακρίνω* (*anachrino*) appear three times in verses 14-15 (translated “discerned, makes judgments, and judgment.” Those who have the Spirit have the spiritual perception to examine beyond the physical evidence to see God’s wisdom. Those who do not have the Spirit are not in a position to judge as “foolish” the person who has the Spirit. This may also be extended to apply to immature and mature Christians.

⁷ “man without the Spirit” – lit. “natural man” (*ψυχικός άνθρωπος, psychikos anthropos*) – the person who has not received the Spirit – that is, the nonbeliever. Only the believer has received the Spirit (2:12). The Spirit is “in” the person who has entered into a relationship with God through faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Timothy 2:14).

⁸ Since the nonbeliever does not have the Holy Spirit, he/she *cannot* understand and *will not* accept the things of God. This is a general statement. It does not mean the Spirit will not work in the nonbeliever’s life. The Spirit *must* work for a person to believe. But if the nonbeliever rejects the Spirit, he/she cannot expect spiritual understanding.

⁹ “spiritual man” (*πνευματικός, pneumatikos*) – the person with the Holy Spirit; that is, the true believer in Christ.

¹⁰ “Apologetics” refers to giving a defense (*απολογία, apologia*) of the Christian faith.