

1 CORINTHIANS – FACT SHEET 3



Chapter 2:

1 Corinthians commenced with the Apostle's 'executive summary' (1:1-9), reminding the Corinthians of who they were ('the church of God' - 1:2) and who they represented ('in Christ Jesus'- 1:2). Having brought their worldly baggage into the church, the Apostle has to then de-construct their promotion of people (1:12) and reliance on human scholarship, wisdom and philosophy (1:20) for, 'the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom' (1:25).

In chapter 2, Paul begins to reveal the key to God's wisdom. We can consider this under three headers:

First: The SOURCE of God's Wisdom: 1-5

Paul commences this section by recalling his personal experience, with the words, 'when I came to you' (2:1). The Corinthians would have remembered those early conversion days where 'many believed' (Acts 18). For the Apostle, he can appeal to them from personal experience. It is not some vague, mystical concept but rather his personal spiritual experience and testimony. Paul did not come either, promoting his own wisdom or eloquence; but rather came, 'in weakness and fear, and with much trembling (2:3). When he came, it was not 'about Paul', it was 'about God' (2:1). The Apostle also knew the source of God's 'power unto salvation'; and so was not detracted with side issues; resolving 'to know nothing...except Christ crucified' (2:2). If verse 3 reveals Paul's weakness, his source of power and wisdom is revealed in verse 4; namely 'the Spirit' of God. This section gives us a remarkable picture of the power of the Triune God in co-operation with the weakness of man:

- Verse 1 – it was 'about God'
- Verse 2 – 'Christ and Him crucified'
- Verse 3 – The Apostles 'weakness....fear....trembling'
- Verse 4 – 'the Spirit's power'
- Verse 5 – 'God's power'

It's not people power or man's wisdom that is the source of God's wisdom – but rather the Spirit of God.

Second: The MYSTERY of God's wisdom:

Paul utilises words throughout his letter that the Corinthians would have been well used to – wisdom, mature, spiritual, knowledge. These words would have been bandied about by the Corinthians; but in ways that promoted themselves. The Apostle re-defines them on God's terms; for these sought after qualities are only authentically found in Him.

Yet Paul does state that there is a 'wisdom', but that only the 'mature' can access (2:6). The 'mature' would be those grounded in and focussed on Christ crucified. This maturity and wisdom was counter cultural, 'not the wisdom of this age' (2:6). Rather, this was God's 'secret wisdom' (2:7); God's message of the Cross which He 'destined...before time began' (2:7) – the Cross was not an after-thought. God's 'secret wisdom' is hidden to those who rely on human wisdom. The ignorance of the 'rulers of this age' was demonstrated, Paul says, as they crucified Christ (2:8). As the words of Jesus Himself on the cross showed, 'Father forgive them, *for they know not what they do*' (Luke 23:34). In a selective mix of words from Isaiah 64 & 65, verse 9 summarises the futility of man's attempts in His own strength, to understand God's wisdom in the Cross. Neither man's sight, hearing nor thoughts are able to perceive it. However, verse 10 gives us one of the many wonderful 'but God's in the scriptures; for it is He who has, 'revealed it to us by His Spirit'. Verses 10ff to 15 then reveal to us the **ministry of the Spirit who:**

- Searches all things – 10ff
- Reveals God's thoughts - 11
- Gives us understanding – 12
- Gives us the words to speak – 13
- Gives us the ability to explain – 13

The contrast between those endeavouring to access God through their own methods and wisdom and those who do so 'by His Spirit', is shown in verses 14 & 15. They can be simply described as, 'the man without the Spirit' (2:14) and 'the Spiritual man' (2:15).

Finally, verse 16 shows us the **IMPACT of God's wisdom:**

The Apostle, quoting Isaiah 40:13, recognising the wisdom in the Triune God's plan, is comfortable in his substitution of 'the mind of Yahweh' (Isaiah 40:13), for 'the mind of Christ' (2:16). It is none other than the power and wisdom of the Godhead that is at work in those who believe. The Spirit of God, the source of God's wisdom, through the mystery of God's wisdom in the Cross, transforms our frail, unperceptive minds, into 'the mind of Christ'. Nothing less than this will enable God's Church to move forward together, to truly serve, truly love, truly be instruments of transformation. As the Apostle moves into the forthcoming chapters, it is with the wisdom of 'the Spirit of God', that God's people will be able to discern God's purposes for them.

For further study:

There are many 'but God's' in scripture – how do the following encourage you? 1 Cor 2:10, Psalm 73:26, Romans 5:8, 1 Cor 3:6
Do you have another favourite?

Further Reading/Bibliography: *The Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians (Morris, Tyndale), The Message of 1 Corinthians (Prior, IVP) 1 Corinthians, A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary (Thiselton, Eerdmans).*

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word" Psalm 119:18