

## Unpopular Wisdom – 1 Corinthians 2:6 – 3:4

**Introduction** – In 2:5, Paul said that faith would not come through the wisdom of men but in the power of God. As he continues his argument, we see that Paul is not against wisdom per se. He is against the wisdom of the unspiritual man, the wisdom of enlightened man, the wisdom of popular, uplifting, “you can find wisdom within you” man. The self-proclaimed “wise” Corinthians are Paul’s problem children. This is unpopular wisdom for lousy Christians – and sometimes it hits just a little too close to home.

**Plenty of Spiritual, but Unpopular, Wisdom (2:6-9)** – Remember, Paul has explicitly defined the context of true wisdom: Christ crucified (1:22-24). So, of course Paul has wisdom to proclaim, but it’s not the sophism so popular among the elitists, the one’s who thought they had reached a higher level of enlightenment as humans so often think they have. It’s not the latest message, but more like the oldest (v6), and not the wisdom of the rulers of “*this age who are coming to nothing*” – the Romans and the religious leaders of the day (Psalm 2:1-2). It is the wisdom of Christ (Col 1:28). Paul is not afraid of wisdom – the right wisdom.

This wisdom was a hidden mystery predestined before the ages for our glory (v7, Eph 1:3-4). God hid it through the course of human history and the rulers of this age (the princely rulers and the spiritual forces behind them) did not know what was coming (v8). The Gospel was and is a challenge to all earthy thrones, including social and political power. Jesus is Lord. Do not settle for a gospel which allows the world’s power to proceed without challenge as though King Jesus were irrelevant for them. And here the irony of this wisdom is put forth (v8b): the most heinous murder in the history of the world brought the end to the powers of the old age and ushered in the salvation of the world.

The OT supports this fact, although it was shrouded in mystery. An amalgamation of Isaiah 64:4 and 65:16, along with an echo of Dan 2:19-23, are used to make this point (v9). God prepared something for the fallen human race and it began its glorious fruition since the cross and will continue throughout the course of history, prior to the resurrection. What He is bringing forth will stagger the imagination – and this too is a part of the wisdom of God, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This gospel age has already broken in. “*The death and resurrection form the decisive break, the moment when the great melody of history has begun to be heard in a major key instead of a minor one*” – N.T. Wright.

**Spiritual Wisdom Only Comes from the Spirit (2:10-13)** – The distinction being made in these verses is not between two kinds of Christians; they are distinctions between Christians (who have received the Spirit) and those who belong to the old age (who are coming to nothing). The hidden wisdom of God (Christ crucified) is revealed to us by the Spirit of God (v10). Just as it takes the spirit of a man to interpret his own deepest thoughts, so also it takes the Spirit of God to do so for the thoughts of God (v11-12). Therefore, only those who have the Spirit of God can receive the interpretation (comparison) of spiritual things (v13), including this good news of the overthrow of all carnal wisdom and power.

**The Enlightened Man Cannot/Will Not/Does Not Want Know this Wisdom (2:14-16)** – Verse 14 does not say “enlightened” man but this is the term we use for a similar kind of man. The “*natural man*” in Greek thinking was the man who “had arrived.” He was man at his best. He was mature, equipped, and prepared to be the most successful citizen. He was wise in the eyes of that world. But Paul makes clear that man does not receive the true wisdom of God. He does not because he cannot, for they must be spiritually discerned. We are not to worry about the foolish judgments he might reign down on those who are spiritual. He cannot come to see or believe that Jesus is Lord and especially that Jesus is Lord here and now and over everything such that every knee must bow (v15, Phil 2:9-11). Christians only have the “mind of Christ” because only Christians have the Spirit of Christ (v16).

**Unpopular Wisdom for Lousy Christians (3:1-4)** – And what has Paul so peeved is that the Corinthians, for all their gifts of the Spirit, were not spiritual. He isn't saying they aren't Christians. He is saying they are "*babes in Christ*." But that is not a compliment, nor is it neutral. They had started that way, but they should have grown up. No, they are "*carnal*," fleshly. Put simply, they are lousy Christians who think they are wise. Imagining they had a wisdom which elevated them above the ordinary ("I am of Paul, I am of Apollos..."), eager to put together a bit of popular sophistry with their Christian faith, they thought they were becoming super-Christians.

And the indication of their carnality? They loved to do spiritual dress-ups and with "zeal." "Envy" is the same word indicating a zeal which does not try to help others but rather to harm them, the predominant concern being for personal advancement (TDNT). Paul knew about this kind of zeal/envy firsthand (Phil 3:6, Gal 1:14). The result was envy, strife and divisions among them – the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21). How does this personally apply? Where does this show up in our situation? It shows up in the man or woman who thinks he or she is quite wise in our faith, well-studied, or worse, has added to the gospel all kinds of additional enlightenment – and yet – their children hate them, their spouse privately thinks they are a jerk, they can't seem to keep any long-term relationships, they stay away from community. They are contentious, argumentative, full of themselves. Thinking themselves wise, in actuality they are lousy Christians.

**But We Speak the Wisdom of Christ Crucified** – Those sins, they are just the ones that Christ died for and conquered. The Cross of Christ declares the death of that old age, that old way of self-justifying, and declares the arrival of the new age, the new way of being human. This is the wisdom of walking in the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of Christ. Listen to 2:9 again and ask yourself – "do you love Him?" "do you love His wisdom?" If so, then you will not be able to fully comprehend all that He has for you and for His church in this world. But you will begin to believe, imagine, – and live like it.

Dave Hatcher – May 25, 2018

## Notes for Little Saints

If you know the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the story of His death and resurrection, the forgiveness of your sins and the work of your salvation by grace through faith – you know something that was once a mystery – even to the smartest theologians of old.

2:7 – Paul spoke of a mystery which was \_\_\_\_\_ before.

2:9 – Quoting from Isaiah, Paul says that we could never have imagined what God was going to do for the world.

These are the things which God has prepared for those who \_\_\_\_\_ Him.

2:10 – How has God revealed them to us?

3:1-4 – But we do not act like we have this wisdom if we fight and quarrel with one another. What might that mean for children?

Do you fight all the time with your siblings?

Do you argue with your parents instead of obeying and honoring them?

If so, read 2:9 again – and really think through what God has done for you. It should change you.