



A Beautiful Mess

1 CORINTHIANS

1 Cor. 1:26-31 (NASB)

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Key Points:

1. The Weakness of the Messenger:
The Power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
2. The Wisdom of the Mature:
The Presence of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-15)

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (ESV)

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

Outline of 1 Corinthians

TOPICAL STRUCTURE OF 1 CORINTHIANS

Chapters	Positional Sanctification Reflected in Holy Living
1:1-9	Introduction
1:10-4:21	Divisions in the Church
5:1-6:20	Disorders in the Church
7:1-16:18	Difficulties in the Church
16:19-24	Conclusion

John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985) 2:506

Paul's Example

- 1 Cor. 2:1 (ESV), “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.”
- Paul concludes 1 Corinthians 1:30 by saying “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” This is in contrast to the Corinthians who were boasting about their favorite teacher, their spiritual gifts, or the oratory ability that their culture valued.

Paul's Example

- 1 Cor. 2:2 (ESV), “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”
- Prime writes in *Opening Up 1 Corinthians* (p. 22), “In giving too much importance to preachers and their personalities, the Corinthians lost sight of the fundamental truth that the effectiveness of preaching is not in the personality and gifts of the preacher but in the message of the cross itself and the Holy Spirit who confirms it by his power.”

Glory in Christ or Gifts

- The message that the world and some of the Corinthians found foolish is the essential message of Christianity (the essence of the gospel).
- Wiersbe writes, “Too many preachers of the Word so magnify themselves and their gifts that they fail to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ. Paul gloried in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14) and made it the center of his message.”
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 573.

1 Cor. 2:3-5 (ESV)

- “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”
- Paul, who had every reason to be confident, is weak and trembling as he approaches the ministry due to his feelings of personal inadequacy but God uses it so the Corinthians will depend on God and not a human being.

Glory in Christ or Gifts

- However, we must note that Paul is not telling ministers deliberately to preach poorly, or to avoid using the gifts God gave them. Men like Charles Spurgeon and George Whitefield were gifted orators whose words carried power, but they did not depend on their natural talents. They trusted the Spirit of God to work in the hearts of their hearers, and He did. Those who minister the Word must prepare and use every gift God has given them—but they must not put their confidence in themselves (see 2 Cor. 3:5).
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 573.

Quote by DA Carson

- What Paul avoided was artificial communication that won plaudits for the speaker but distracted from the message. Lazy preachers have no right to appeal to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 to justify indolence in the study and careless delivery in the pulpit. These verses do not prohibit diligent preparation, passion, clear articulation, and persuasive presentation. Rather, they warn against any method that leads people to say, ‘What a marvelous preacher!’ rather than, ‘What a marvelous Savior!’”

Constable referring to Carson

- Paul constructed his argument in this section with three contrasts that overlap slightly. The first contrast is between those who receive God's wisdom and those who do not (vv. 6-10a), and the second one is the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world (vv. 10b-13). The third contrast is the “natural” person and the “spiritual” person (vv. 14-16)
- Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 2:5.

1 Cor. 2:6-8 (ESV)

“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 glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

Maturity Clarified

- In contrast to the Corinthians who thought they were mature because they listened to their favorite preacher (especially the orator Apollos) and criticized Paul's ministry based on worldly reasons (to the extent that some considered him to be a false apostle), Paul endeavors to teach the true wisdom which comes from the Holy Spirit.
- If Jesus, Paul and others were criticized, what makes us think we will be different (illustration: my first experience in ministry - welcome to the cross).

Great Quote by Wiersbe

- Three times in that passage, Paul explains that all of this is done for God's glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). It is a staggering thought that we shall one day share in the very glory of God!
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 574.

1 Cor. 2:9-10 (ESV)

- "But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him-- ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."
- Ravi Zacharias said based on the idea of Calvin, "If you think you can comprehensively explain God you have severely misunderstood Him."
- God reveals His truth through the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 2:11 (ESV)

- “For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”
- Just as a person generally knows his or her thoughts best, the Holy Spirit as God knows the thoughts of the Triune God.

1 Cor. 2:12-13 (ESV)

- “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”
- God freely gives His Holy Spirit so we can discover His truth which He desires us to understand.

Blessed are the Balanced

- The Corinthian Christians were so wrapped up in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that they were neglecting the basic ministries of the Spirit. And in their emphasis on the Spirit, they were also neglecting the Father and the Son. Blessed are the balanced! And blessed are they who understand and share “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 577.

1 Cor. 2:14-15 (ESV)

- “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.”
- The natural person, i.e. the unbeliever, cannot understand the truth the Holy Spirit reveals.

Quote by Dr. John Piper

- “A word of clarification about the word ‘spiritual.’ When Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 2:14 (‘the things of the Spirit of God . . . are spiritually discerned’), he does not mean ‘religious’ or ‘mystical’ or ‘otherworldly.’ That’s the way most people would hear the word ‘spiritual’ today. Instead, it means originating by the Holy Spirit and having the quality of the Holy Spirit – formed by the character of the Holy Spirit.”

Another Quote by Wiersbe

- The unsaved person does not understand the Christian; they live in two different worlds. But the Christian understands the unsaved person. First Corinthians 2:15 does not suggest that unsaved people cannot point out flaws in the believer's life (they often do), but that the unsaved man really cannot penetrate into the full understanding of what the Christian's life is all about. I like the *New American Standard Bible's* translation: "But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man." That "no man" includes other Christians as well. We must be very careful not to become spiritual dictators in the lives of God's people (2 Cor. 1:24).
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 577.

1 Cor. 2:16 (ESV)

- “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”
- To “have the mind of Christ” does not mean we are infallible and start playing God in the lives of other people. Nobody instructs God! (Paul quoted Isa. 40:13. Also see Rom. 11:33-36.) To “have the mind of Christ” means to look at life from the Saviour’s point of view, having His values and desires in mind. It means to think God’s thoughts and not think as the world thinks.
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 577.

Good Summary by Fee

- “Paul’s concern needs to be resurrected throughout the church. The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather, it leads to special status vis-à-vis the world. But it should do so always in terms of the centrality of the message of our crucified/risen Savior. The Spirit should identify God’s people in such a way that their values and worldview are radically different from the wisdom of this age.”
- Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Revised Edition, 128.

Key Points:

1. The Weakness of the Messenger:
The Power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
2. The Wisdom of the Mature:
The Presence of the Spirit (1
Corinthians 2:6-15)
3. Closing Illustration about singing