

1 Corinthians – Lesson 4

SECTION OUTLINE ONE (1 CORINTHIANS 1)

Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthian church by giving thanks to God for the many gifts this church has received from the Lord. He then addresses two problems facing the Corinthian church.

I. THE PERSONAL GREETINGS FROM PAUL (1:1–3)

A. The recipients (1:1–2)

1. *Paul writes to the Corinthian believers (1:1–2a).*
2. *Paul writes to all believers (1:2b).*

B. The blessing (1:3): Paul wishes them grace and peace.

II. THE PRAYER OF PAUL (1:4–9)

A. Paul thanks God for the gifts God has given the Corinthian believers (1:4–7): They received all the spiritual gifts.

B. Paul thanks God for the guarantee God gave the Corinthian believers (1:8–9): This guarantee refers to their eternal security.

III. THE PROBLEMS ADDRESSED BY PAUL (1:10–31): Paul discusses two of the numerous problems confronting the Corinthian church.

A. They are elevating human leaders (1:10–17).

1. *The individuals (1:10–12):* Some are fans of Paul; some, of Apollos; and others, of Simon Peter.
2. *The issue (1:14–16):* Apparently the argument consists mainly of who baptized them.
3. *The insanity (1:13, 17):* Paul rebukes them, hitting his own “fan club” the hardest.
 - a. “Was I, Paul, crucified for you?” (1:13a).
 - b. “Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13b).
 - c. “Christ didn’t send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News” (1:17).

B. They are exalting human wisdom (1:18–31): Paul contrasts and compares the egocentric wisdom of people with the eternal wisdom of God.

1. *The response to God’s wisdom (1:18, 22–23)*
 - a. In regard to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles (1:18, 22–23)
 - (1) To the Jews who demand supernatural signs, it becomes a stumbling block (1:18a, 22a, 23a).
 - (2) To the Gentiles who depend upon vain philosophy, it becomes foolishness (1:18b, 22b, 23b).
 - b. In regard to believing Jews and Gentiles (1:18c, 24–25): It represents both the power and wisdom of God.
2. *The results of God’s wisdom (1:19–21)*
 - a. It is used to destroy worldly wisdom (1:19–20).
 - b. It is used to deliver repenting sinners (1:21).
3. *The reason for God’s wisdom (1:26–31):* Why did God choose the Cross to save people?
 - a. Paul’s overview (1:27–31): God delights in using foolish, weak, lowly, and despised things to nullify the wise, strong, exalted, and respected things.
 - b. Paul’s observation (1:26): He tactfully reminds the arrogant Corinthians of their own lack of worldly influence and academic wisdom!¹

¹ Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

2 And I (Κἀγώ), brethren (ἀδελφός), when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech (λόγος) or of wisdom (σοφία) declaring (καταγγέλλω) to you the testimony (μαρτύριον) of God. 2 For I determined (κρίνω) not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (σταυρώω). 3 I was with you in weakness (ἀσθένεια), in fear (φόβος), and in much trembling (τρόμος). 4 And my speech (λόγος) and my preaching (κήρυγμα) were not with persuasive words (λόγος) of human wisdom (σοφία), but in demonstration of the Spirit (πνεῦμα) and of power (δύναμις), 5 that your faith (πίστις) should not be in the wisdom (σοφία) of men but in the power (δύναμις) of God.

2:1 – As Paul begins chapter 2, he picks up where he left off in 1:17 by switching back emphatically to the first person singular with **Κἀγώ (“And I”)**. Paul used the first person singular in 1:10-17, switched to the first person plural in 1:18-25, and then to the second person plural for the remainder of the first chapter (1:26-31). Paul also begins this new paragraph as he did in 1:26 by addressing them as brothers and sisters. Paul is reminding them of the way he first presented the gospel to them. He did not come proclaiming the testimony of God with superior speech or wisdom – things that the Corinthians were now most interested in! (There is some manuscript evidence for “mystery” instead of “testimony”. Paul will use “mystery” shortly in verse 7 but he used testimony in reference to the gospel in 1:6 and “testimony” seems best to fit his argument here.)

2:2 – Paul now explains why as he begins verse 2 with an explanatory γάρ (“for”). When he came to Corinth (with his memory fresh of his experience in Athens), Paul resolved to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Looking back at 1:31, it is most fitting to consider Paul’s words in *Galatians 6:14*.

2:3-5 – Once again, Paul uses the emphatic καὶ ἐγώ (“And I”) to continue his description of his preaching; however, the NKJV translators chose to omit the καί (“and”) which is the first word in the Greek text. While verse 1 seems to indicate Paul’s arrival in Corinth, these verses seem to describe much of his 18-month stay there. It was in much weakness (used to describe the cross in 1:25 and what God used to shame the strong in 1:27) and in fear and much trembling. While there is much conjecture on the exact meaning of these three terms, perhaps we shouldn’t be too precise. Paul is possibly referring to his “thorn in the flesh” (2 *Corinthians* 12:7) or other physical infirmity (*Galatians* 4:13-14). But we also know from *Acts* 18:9-10 that Paul must have been afraid during the first part of his stay in Corinth. Fear and trembling could also refer to Paul’s view of his task – both for whom he was working and also for the seriousness of salvation. (See *Ephesians* 6:5; *Philippians* 2:12-13; and *Hebrews* 12:20-21.) Leon Morris makes this observation in his commentary on 1 *Corinthians*: “In any case the Corinthians were not very impressed by his personal presence (2 *Cor.* 10:10; in the second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla* Paul is said to be ‘a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked’).”² Whatever the exact meaning, it seems Paul wants the Corinthians to be reminded how unlike the philosophers and others mentioned in 1:20 he was and yet they had responded to the gospel. He continues that his words (method of speech) and the message of the cross (content) were not with persuasive words of wisdom. On the

² Morris, L. (1985). *Vol. 7: 1 Corinthians: An introduction and commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (p 56). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

contrary, the most rigorous proof (ἀπόδειξις – “**demonstration**”) had been given by the power of the Holy Spirit. It seems likely that Paul is using two terms synonymously – Spirit and power. Paul had given thanks that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift (1:7) but it could also refer to the power of the word (*Hebrews 4:12*). Paul then gives the reason that the gospel was not preached with the wisdom of words: so that their faith would be in the power of God!

6 However, we speak wisdom (σοφία) among those who are mature (τέλειος), yet not the wisdom (σοφία) of this age (αἰών), nor of the rulers (αρχων) of this age (αἰών), who are coming to nothing (καταργέω). 7 But (ἀλλά) we speak the wisdom (σοφία) of God in a mystery (μυστήριον), the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages (αἰών) for our glory (δόξα), 8 which none of the rulers (ἄρχων) of this age (αἰών) knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified (σταυρώω) the Lord of glory (δόξα).

9 But (ἀλλά) as it is written (γράφω):

***“Eye (ὀφθαλμός) has not seen, nor ear heard (ἀκούω),
Nor have entered into the heart (καρδία) of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love (ἀγαπάω) Him.”***

10 But God has revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω) them to us through His Spirit (πνεῦμα). For (γάρ) the Spirit (πνεῦμα) searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For (γάρ) what man knows the things of a man except the spirit (πνεῦμα) of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit (πνεῦμα) of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit (πνεῦμα) of the world (κόσμος), but the Spirit (πνεῦμα) who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given (χαρίζομαι) to us by God.

2:6 – Paul begins here with a line of thought which will continue through 3:4 when he reiterates the charge of *preacheritis* made in 1:12. These verses continue to be a source of controversy among scholars but it appears Paul is continuing to address the same concerns he had in chapter 1 with what Richard Oster calls “additional terms and images.”³ In the first verses of chapter 2, Paul had reminded the Corinthians that his preaching had not been with persuasive words of human wisdom so that their faith would not be in the wisdom of men. However, Paul begins this verse by speaking about the wisdom he and others (“**we**”) did preach – among the τέλειος – “**the mature**”. This Greek word appears 19 times in the New Testament and generally means “**attaining an end or purpose; complete.**” It is often translated “**perfect**” (15 times in NKJV) and also “**mature**” (3 times in NKJV). Paul will use τέλειος two more times in this letter but its use in the following passages is helpful to our understanding: *Ephesians 4:11-13*; *Philippians 3:13-15*; *Colossians 1:28*; and *Hebrews 5:14*. Paul emphasizes that the wisdom they preached or with which they spoke was not the wisdom of the age (“what was popular at the time”) or the wisdom of the rulers of that time who are doomed to pass away (καταργέω). Paul uses this word nine times in this letter. The first time was in 1:28 where it was translated “bring to nothing”. While some have supposed demonic powers are in view with these rulers, verse 8 puts that erroneous notion to rest. Rather, the reference is to the leaders of the day and most likely Paul is referring to the Roman government that was in authority.

³ Oster, R. (1995). 1 Corinthians (1 Co 2:6). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

2:7-10 – In a strong contrast to the wisdom of the day, Paul states that he and the others spoke the (ὁ – definite article) hidden and mysterious wisdom of God. This mystery of God which He kept hidden was decreed or foreordained before time began for our glory. Many passages can be used to explain this mystery (μυστήριον – used by Paul four more times in this letter) such as *Romans 16:25-27*; *Ephesians 3:1-12*; and *Colossians 1:24-28*. Paul will explain our future resurrection glory to the Corinthians in *15:42-44* but he also does so in *Romans 8:28-30*. We also read about this in *Hebrews 2:9-10*. If the rulers of this age – both governmental and religious – had understood God’s wisdom, they would not have crucified Jesus. Instead, they relied on their own wisdom and put our Savior to death. For the use of “rulers” in this passage, see also *Luke 24:18-20*; *Acts 3:17*; *Acts 4:24-28*; and *Acts 13:26-28*. Here Paul affixes the title “**Lord of glory**” to Christ. Previously, this is descriptive of God (*Acts 7:2* and *Ephesians 1:17*) but our Lord’s brother makes a similar statement in *James 2:1*. With the strong adversative ἀλλά – “**but**”, Paul introduces a sharp contrast to the thinking that lead to the cruel crucifixion of our Lord. Paul cites scripture (“**as it is written**”) but it is a difficult one to identify. Most probably it is centered on *Isaiah 64:4* and the meaning seems to be that man cannot conceive by his cognitive skills (or human wisdom) what God has prepared for those who love Him. If he could, he would not have killed the Son of God. These hidden things – the mystery of God’s wisdom – have been revealed to Paul and other believers through God’s Holy Spirit (cf. *John 16:13*). With an explanatory γάρ – “**for**”, we learn from the inspired Paul that the Spirit searches all things – even the depths of God. Man cannot do what the Holy Spirit does. (See also *Romans 11:33*.)

2:11-12 – With another explanatory γάρ (“**for**”), Paul offers a comparison between the human spirit and God’s Spirit. Richard Oster describes Paul’s illustration like this: “Just as the human spirit serves as the window into a person’s inner thoughts, convictions and values, so God’s Spirit, and only God’s Spirit, serves as a window into the deep and inner thoughts of God.”⁴ It appears that when Paul first switched to the first person plural, he was referring to the preachers in verse 6 above but now is referring to the Corinthians as well as all Christians who have received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit. We did not receive the spirit of the world when we put on Christ in baptism. (But remember in the background that the Corinthians have been acting as if they were being led by the spirit of the world.) See also *Romans 8:13-17*; *Galatians 3:2-3*; and *Ephesians 1:16-21*.

13 These things we also speak, not in words (λόγος) which man’s wisdom (σοφία) teaches (διδασκός) but (ἀλλά) which the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα) teaches (διδασκός), comparing (συγκρίνω) spiritual things (πνευματικός) with spiritual (πνευματικός). **14** But the natural man does not receive (δέχομαι) the things of the Spirit (πνεῦμα) of God, for they are foolishness (μωρία) to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually (πνευματικῶς) discerned (ἀνακρίνω). **15** But he who is spiritual (πνευματικός) judges (ἀνακρίνω) all things, yet he himself is rightly judged (ἀνακρίνω) by no one. **16** For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

2:13 – Paul and other Christians must pass on these revealed truths of God to others not with words of human wisdom but with words taught by the Spirit. Paul had already alluded to this in the first five verses of this chapter. He then concludes with a phrase that continues to baffle both translators and scholars. The actual Greek phrase is just three

⁴ Oster, R. (1995). 1 Corinthians (1 Co 2:11). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

words: **πνευματικός πνευματικός συγκρίνω** which somewhat explains the difficulty of making an English translation.

2:14 – The NKJV translates the Greek particle **δέ** (“but”) as Paul begins a contrast between the natural person (**ψυχικός**) and the spiritual person (**πνευματικός**). **Ψυχικός** (from which we get the English word “psychic”) refers to the life of the natural world. In this context, it means “one who merely functions bodily, without being touched by the Spirit of God.”⁵ This natural person does not accept or receive (and **δέχομαι** often refers to the welcome reception of a guest) the things of the Spirit of God. Why? Because (**γάρ** – “for”) the things of the Spirit of God are folly (**μωρία** – “moronic”) to the natural person. Paul has already stated that the message of the cross or the crucified Christ is folly to those who are perishing and the Gentiles (*1 Corinthians 1:18, 23*). Also, the natural person does not have the capability or power to understand or know the things of the Spirit of God (or else the rulers of this age would not have crucified the Lord of glory – verse 8 above). The reason the natural person is unable to understand the things of the Spirit of God is because those things are spiritually (**πνευματικῶς** – adverb) discerned (**ἀνακρίνω**). This Greek verb **ἀνακρίνω** is used by Paul ten times in this epistle but in no other of his writings which may indicate this was “a Corinthian word that Paul is taking up against them.”⁶ Luke is the only other New Testament writer to use this word – once in his gospel (*Luke 23:14*) and four times in *Acts* (e.g., *17:11*). The word is often used in a judicial sense but can also mean “to engage in careful study of a question.”⁷

2:15 – The “spiritual” (**πνευματικός** – an adjective) person – in contrast to the “natural” (**ψυχικός**) person – judges (**ἀνακρίνω**) all things. Those who are led by the Spirit of God (*Romans 8:14*) make judgments about all things based upon the revelation of the Holy Spirit whereas the natural person only has man’s wisdom to guide him in his decisions. Therefore, the spiritual person is to be judged (**ἀνακρίνω**) by no one. This verse has suffered from many misinterpretations. It does not mean that spiritual men cannot “be called upon to account for their actions.”⁸

2:16 – Paul is now going to explain his statements of the previous verse as indicated by the introductory **γάρ** (“for”) with a quotation from *Isaiah 40:13* (cf. *Romans 11:33-34*). Paul adapts the words of Isaiah into a rhetorical question that demands an answer of “No one.” Earlier Paul had said basically some of the same things in verses 11-12. No one has understood the mind of the Lord to be able to instruct Him in anything, but Paul can avow that we – the **πνευματικός** – have the mind of Christ. Earlier Paul had urged the Corinthians to be united in the same mind (*1 Corinthians 1:10*). It seems now that Paul is using mind (**νοῦς**) almost synonymously with spirit (**πνεῦμα**). Gordon Fee’s remarks are to the point: “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

⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 1100). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 117). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 66). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ Morris, L. (1985). *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 64). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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.”⁹

SECTION OUTLINE TWO (1 CORINTHIANS 2)

Paul reflects on his founding of the church in Corinth and reminds the Corinthian believers of several facts in regard to the Cross.

I. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IS NOT OF THIS WORLD (2:1–6).

A. The apostle’s resolve (2:1–4)

1. What he determines not to do (2:1): He will not depend on eloquence or education in his preaching.
2. What he determines to do (2:2–4): He will depend completely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. The apostle’s reason (2:5–6): He will do this so their faith will rest on God’s Word and not on his wisdom.

II. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS WAS ORDAINED BEFORE THIS WORLD (2:7–8).

A. Handcrafted for the saved (2:7): This involves God’s wise plan to bring believers into the glories of heaven.

B. Hidden from the unsaved (2:8): Had they known the truth, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

III. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS WAS RESERVED FOR THE HEIRS OF THIS WORLD (2:9–16).

A. Concealed from the human spirit (2:9): No mortal can ever see, hear, or even imagine what wonderful things God has prepared for those who love him.

B. Revealed by the Holy Spirit (2:10–16)

1. What he does (2:10–12): He reveals to us God’s deepest secrets.
2. How he does it (2:13–16): This is accomplished through the Scriptures.¹⁰

⁹ Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 120). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹⁰ Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible* (1 Co 2). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.