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A1146 – November 13, 2011 – 1 Corinthians 2:6-11
The Gospel Revealed By The Spirit To Apostles & Prophets

If you would open your Bible to 1 Cor 2 we are entering today into a debated section of Scripture because commentators tend to go one of two directions on the passage and I'm not going to go in either of those directions, meaning the direction I'm going to go is unique. So while it's not really a hard passage it will be hard to get through because many Christians have heard it taught one of two ways and I'm not going to teach either of those ways.

The section is debated for two reasons: one, the meanings of the words and expressions Paul uses. In several cases the words and expressions can have multiple meanings. So which meaning is the meaning Paul intended? Two, what is the argument Paul is making? As you know Paul is not always easy to follow. He writes many things that are difficult and the flow of Paul's argument is very difficult to follow in this section.

But no matter what conclusions I come to I hope you can set aside your preconceived notions of what it means and consider this exposition and understand that I'm doing the very best I can to make sense of the passage as Paul intended. So understand that there are numerous things debated in this passage but to keep the air clear of confusion the way I am going to present the passage is to give my conclusions and only touch here and there the other two view points. My reason in not elaborating on other conclusions is I think it will only confuse and my goal is to clarify not confuse.

Now in verse 6 Paul picks up by guarding against any misunderstanding on the Corinthian's part. Over and over he has said to Gentiles the gospel is foolishness so he says, **Yet we do speak wisdom** that is, now just because the world interprets the gospel as foolishness, it is not foolishness, it is **wisdom** but of a different sort. And **we do speak wisdom among those**

who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away. Now there are several things here, one is **wisdom**, what does Paul mean by **wisdom**? Two is who is the **we** who **speak wisdom**? Who do you mean, Paul, by **we**? You've been saying "I," "I," "I" in vv 1-5 so who is **we** in vv 6-13? Finally who are the **mature**? Should this word be translated "believer" or is it translated correctly as mature, referring to advanced believers? All these things are debated.

The first thing to do is define **wisdom**, the wisdom that Paul says **we speak**. Turn to 1:17. We're just going to go back in the context because Paul has mentioned several times what he preached, what he spoke; that is his message and he's said it is wisdom, but it's not human wisdom it's God's wisdom. So the wisdom is clearly the message Paul preached but its not human wisdom, its God's wisdom. What exactly is the message Paul preached that he says is wisdom? Let's just trace it. In 1:17 Paul says, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel," So we have the gospel in view, Paul was sent to preach the gospel. The first designation of wisdom is it is the gospel. And the latter part of verse 17 summarizes the gospel as "the cross of Christ." So the wisdom of God is the gospel which is the cross of Christ. Now come down to verse 23. "but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." So here Paul very clearly says that Christ is the wisdom of God. Now we have three things that are the wisdom of God, one - the gospel, that's the proclamation, the message proclaimed; two - the cross of Christ, that's the work of Christ, what Christ did on the cross in dying for our sins and third - Christ himself, that's the person of Christ. And I want to just point out, because we'll come back to it, in verse 17 Paul says *I* preach but in verse 23 Paul says *we* preach. So sometimes Paul is just speaking of himself and sometimes Paul is speaking of himself and others. Who are these others? It's very important to identify the others. But before we leave wisdom come down to verse 30 to one last verse. "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God," so Christ is the wisdom of God, but then he defines the wisdom of God further by saying "justification and sanctification and glorification," that's a definition in the Greek text of Christ Jesus, the wisdom of God. So the wisdom of God here is Christ Jesus, the person of Christ but also the work of Jesus Christ, our justification and our sanctification and our glorification. So let's define **wisdom** as *the person and*

work of Jesus Christ in providing the entirety of our salvation. Or we might simply summarize as 2:2 does, the wisdom of God is Christ and Him crucified. That is the message that Paul says I was sent to preach.

And now that we've defined **wisdom** we want to come back to 1:23 and 2:6 where Paul uses the plural **we**, "we preach" and determine who is **we**? Because if you scan from 2:1 down to 2:5 you'll see "I," meaning Paul, used over and over and over. Verse 1, "And when *I* came to you, brethren, *I* did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom..." verse 2, "For *I* determined to know nothing..." verse 3, "*I* was with you in weakness. It's all "I," "I," "I" but then in verse 6 it shifts and says **Yet we speak wisdom**. And who's **we** Paul? When we see "we" it can be the inclusive use or the exclusive use of **we**. The exclusive use would mean Paul is referring to himself and others exclusive of the Corinthians. The inclusive use means Paul is referring to himself and all the Corinthians. So is it the exclusive or inclusive use? I would argue from context it is the exclusive use. Paul is excluding the Corinthians from those who speak wisdom. Why do I say that? Because the Corinthians were accommodating to a worldly manner of speech and a worldly manner of reasoning to Christ. They were not speaking the wisdom of God at all. The whole passage is a rebuke. Paul is rebuking them for trying to preach the gospel by starting with human reason rather than divine revelation. They thought the world and its methods were just so great and they could make the gospel more palatable and acceptable to the unbelievers flesh, that they could bypass the work of the Holy Spirit and by a slick method of talking or a slick method of reasoning win more converts to Christ. So Paul is not including them in the **we speak wisdom**, he is excluding them but he is including others. The only question is who are the others? And if we go all the way back to 1:12 we find that the **we** is at least Paul, Apollos and Cephas, which is the Aramaic for Peter; so Paul, Apollos and Peter, the Corinthians at least knew these three men, these three men had taught them the wisdom of God. So they knew these three men and they are who Paul refers to when he says **we do speak wisdom among those who are mature**. Now these men were all prophets or apostles. I can prove easily that Paul and Peter were apostles, men commissioned by Christ for the task of preaching the gospel; I can't prove that with Apollos. Apollos was not an apostle but he probably was a prophet. But all I can prove about Apollos definitively is that he was a man mighty in the OT Scriptures and had heard the preaching of John the Baptist. One day in Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila

heard him speaking and they took him aside and gave him updated information about Christ and then he was able to powerfully refute the Jews demonstrating from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. So the **we** are Paul and Peter, who are both apostles and Apollos, who was a prophet. So when Paul says in verse 6 **we speak wisdom** he means me, Peter and Apollos spoke wisdom to you, we taught you. And the **we** section continues in verse 7, **but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery**...down into verse 10, **For to us God revealed them through the Spirit** and verse 12, **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world** and verse 13, **which things we also speak** and even into verse 16b, **But we have the mind of Christ.** So the whole section from vv 6-13 is **we, we, we** and then in 3:1 he comes back to "I." "And I brethren, could not speak to you," you Corinthians. So the **we** does not include the Corinthians! It includes Paul, Apollos and Peter.

Now this is a major, major point. If you don't get this it is my humble opinion that you will fumble the whole passage. So let me reiterate, for complete clarity, everything in vv 6-13 and perhaps even verse 16 refers exclusively to Paul and Apollos and Peter who were prophets and apostles, it does not apply to believers in general. It is an exposition of the process of revelation, how does God reveal His wisdom to man? How do we come to know God? And the answer is very simple. We know God by means of the Holy Spirit who searches the depths of God and reveals the word of God to prophets and apostles who then transmit it to others! Now that's a very simple message but that is the message of the apostle Paul. See, the problem with the Corinthians was that Paul had declared to them that the message they had preached was not sourced in human wisdom, that's the negative side, not sourced in human wisdom. So now he's turning to the positive side, the source of our preaching is divine wisdom, the Holy Spirit. He is the one who searches the depths of God.

So with that as the subject of Paul's text in vv 6-13 let's turn to the third issue, who are the **mature** in verse 6? Now this one is highly debated but honestly I do not think it is determinative of the direction this passage should take. Who are the **mature**? Some say it is a reference to all believers. Paul's just saying we speak wisdom to believers. The argument is that the term *teleios* can refer to an initiate into one of the many mystery religions that were common in the Roman Empire at the time and Paul is picking up the term *teleios* from these mystery religions to describe an initiate into

Christianity. My response to that is there is very little evidence for it. The only thing that would give it any credence is if the variant in verse 1 where it reads “testimony of God,”; if you look in the margin you read the variant “mystery of God.” But even if the variant is the correct reading it doesn’t prove Paul is using mystery to relate to the pagan mystery religions. In fact it would be very strange for him to do that since he has just distanced himself from starting with human wisdom.

The other view, and the one I espouse, is that the *teleios* are the mature, full grown, adult believers. The main reason I conclude this is because of the context. If you notice in 3:1 he mentions the infant believer. “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.” The Greek word for infants is *nepios*, an infant Christian, immature in his thinking, versus the *teleios* man in 2:6 who Paul and Apollos and Peter spoke wisdom too, the depths of the wisdom about Christ and Him crucified. The Corinthians were infants, they were immature in their thinking, Paul couldn’t speak wisdom to them when he first came to them because they were babes in Christ. Now that was five years ago and that’s understandable. Paul says in verse 2, “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly.” So there’s a progression as we grow spiritually, or there’s supposed to be, we’re supposed to grow from infant doctrine to solid doctrine, more advanced truths about Christ and Him crucified, but the Corinthians hadn’t grown, it had been five years and they were still infants, they were not mature.

Now back in 2:6 Paul is saying that he and Apollos and Peter spoke wisdom, the depths of the plan of salvation in Christ to believers who are mature, adult, full grown believers. But the Corinthians were still infants, they couldn’t speak to them as mature, they should have grown to maturity by this time but they were not.

Now turn to 1 Cor 14:20 because I want to show you these same two words, *teleios*, mature and *nepios*, infancy are used again by Paul to describe growing up. Paul wants them to grow up spiritually, but they are still walking by the flesh and you can’t hope to grow up by walking by the flesh, you have to walk by the Spirit to grow. 1 Cor 14:20, the context is spiritual gifts. He says, “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be

infants, but in your thinking be mature.” So there is a way of thinking that is mature and yet the Corinthians were not mature, they were like children in their thinking. They still thought that the world had something to offer so far as knowledge is concerned, that the flesh was quite able and Paul is saying grow up, don’t be children in your thinking, be mature in your thinking. Make the conscious determination I made, to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified, take every thought captive to Christ.

Paul wants them to grow up spiritually, that’s his whole point. But to get them to grow spiritually they have got to understand the issue of authority. God’s word is the authority, not man’s word. Man’s word is just speculation and the Corinthians thought there was some stock in the world’s speculations, that there was some substance to what the flesh could conjure up, but Paul’s point is that the word of God is the authority, we got it from God the Holy Spirit who revealed it directly to us.

Now put practically and I ask you turn to Heb 5:12 as I talk. But practically, 1 Cor 1 and 2 and 3 come down to your orientation to authority as a Christian. Are you still thinking that the world has some answers and that all I need to do is add Christ to what I already know? If you remain in that way of thinking you will remain an infant in Christ. Or is Christ everything and He is the only source of any truth and any knowledge. A sign of maturity. The mature believer has come to the realization that Paul and Apollos and Peter came to, that apart from Christ I know nothing, I don’t know that $1 + 1 = 2$, I don’t know that leaves are green, I don’t know that love is good, and I don’t know anything apart from Christ because the source of knowledge about all those things is that Christ has revealed those things to us. And if Christ did not reveal them to us then we wouldn’t know anything about them at all, nothing, we wouldn’t know what 1 unit is and the difference between 1 unit and another, we would not know what green is or why our eyes see green and we would not know what love is or what good is; knowledge is impossible apart from revelation. And until you have grasped that point you are an infant in Christ, you still think that the world can take you so far and Christ finishes what the world has started. Christ may complete your knowledge but knowledge, genuine knowledge is possible apart from Christ. Paul says that’s a position of immaturity, Paul rejected it outright, Paul said no, I don’t know anything about any subject outside of that subject’s ultimate reference point, Christ and Him crucified, because if I do then I am tacitly admitting that the

world has genuine knowledge independent of God and Paul could not admit that the world had any knowledge independent of God. Why? Because Paul was an evangelist and he wanted to see men come to Christ. So this is Paul's way of showing the utter and total antithesis between Christianity and the world system, between God and man, between Christ and Satan, there are no areas of agreement. What hath righteousness to do with unrighteousness? Paul asks. Nothing. And so Paul set out to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified, He is Lord of all. The Corinthians had not made this conscious determination and consequently they were still infants in Christ. But Paul wants them to grow to maturity so they can move into reward status which is where chapter 3 is going.

Now to show you that the NT constantly contrasts the mature with the infant notice the contrast again in Heb 5:12. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant." There's our word *nepios*, a babe in Christ. Verse 14, "But solid food is for the mature," there's our word *teleio*, a mature believers who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. ¹⁴Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity," there's the word again. But the point is that there is a difference in the level of teaching that believers can handle; infant believers simply have not grown to the point that they can grasp advanced teaching, they can only deal with elementary teaching and the author of Hebrews is saying the same thing Paul is saying to the Corinthians, you're not ready for advanced teaching yet, you need milk and not solid food, you haven't grown spiritually and both passages are rebukes; they should have grown up by now, they should be mature but they're not.

Now come back to 1 Cor 2:6 and we can see easily what Paul is saying, **Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature;** that is we speak solid food among advanced believers, great truths regarding the cross of Christ and all the aspects of what the cross of Christ has affected; a wisdom Paul says, **not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away,** it's not sourced in the wisdom of the world, the rulers of the world who have mastered human wisdom yet are passing away. The rulers of the present world who are experts in human wisdom are gradually passing away.

One by one as God calls men out by the gospel, by His wisdom, as each convert moves out of the world the world moves one inch closer to its final destruction. This world and the rulers of this world and the ideas of the world are gradually being destroyed. The world is vanity, it's temporal, the world is transitory, and it is passing away.

Now Paul says if we didn't get this wisdom from the world that is passing away then where did we get this wisdom? Verse 7, **But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory, 8the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** Now listen very closely, when you see the word **mystery**, as you do in verse 7, you are to immediately begin to think of truths that God has kept hidden, things that God from all eternity had in mind but which He has never revealed. So here is God and God is infinite, He has all knowledge, He is omniscient and He has a plan for history. Down here in history we have the human race and the human race is finite, it has some knowledge but that knowledge is due to God's revelation, whether it be general information in creation or specific information in Scripture. Paul is speaking about the Scriptures by this term mystery, in particular, the specific information, verbally revealed, in words, i.e. the word of the cross. The word of the cross is God's answer for man's problem of sin in Adam, but this **wisdom** was kept **hidden**, it was kept concealed from the human race. God didn't let man know exactly how He was going to solve man's problem, but in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. It was at that moment in history that God unveiled what was previously hidden, the word of the cross and He revealed it's meaning to prophets and apostles like Paul, Apollos and Peter.

That's what Paul's talking about in verse 7, **the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory**, that is, to my glory and Apollos' glory and Peter's glory, before time ever was, God predetermined to reveal the mystery of His wisdom in the cross to those prophets and apostles. They were chosen before history ever was to become the direct recipients of this divine revelation. Paul recognized God had chosen him to be an apostle and a prophet before he was ever born. And to show you this is a common theme of the prophets turn to Gal 1. In Gal 1:14 Paul is giving his

background before he became a Christian, how he excelled in Judaism and in verse 15 he reports his conversion on the Damascus Road and his commissioning and I want you to notice a famous expression, “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...” that’s Paul’s commissioning to preach the gospel and I want you to observe that first expression in verse 15. “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb,” that is a Hebrew way of saying “before time,” “before history,” it’s God’s before time choice of Paul to be a prophet of God.

Now to show you this was not unique to Paul but it was unique to the prophets turn to Jer 1:5. Paul recognized that he was a prophet on the same level as Jeremiah, that he was injected by God into the line of the prophets and that the cause of it was the plan of God. Back of everything is the plan of God. Jeremiah says in verse 4, “Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Notice the same expression Paul used of himself was also used of Jeremiah. It’s a Hebrew expression of God’s choice of a prophet before time. Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Jeremiah recognized this, Paul recognized this and Jesus recognized this too.

My point in taking you through all this is that if you come back to 1 Cor 2:7 you see the same idea. God had a plan before time and part of that plan was to choose certain individuals in history to be His prophets, His messengers. This was to their glory, they were chosen for positions of honor. So that’s verse 7, **we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;** God chose us before time to be the one’s to whom He would reveal His wisdom. Verse 8, **the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;** he says it was completely inaccessible to Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentile mob and the Jewish leadership. For if they had known who Jesus was they would never have ventured to crucify him. The Greek says it is impossible that they would have done it because they would have understood that He had all authority in heaven and on earth. And so by any calculations they would never have crucified him. But they were ignorant of the wisdom of

God, it was kept from them, concealed in the mind of God, it was a mystery only now revealed to Paul, Apollos Peter and the other prophets and apostles.

But Paul says in verse 9, I need Scriptural backing, so he quotes some of the OT writings. The problem is if you go search for this in the OT you won't find a direct quote anywhere. So Paul is picking and choosing parts of passages, this is really a summary of probably three passages quoted here, it's a mixture of three OT passages; Isaiah 64:4, 65:17 and 52:15. He introduces it by saying, **it is written**, appealing to OT Scripture, under divine inspiration he selects three passages. Verse 9, **it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."** The whole point is to say it's been hidden, the world under the dictates of the flesh cannot find out the wisdom of God, there is no linkage there whatsoever, man starting with himself as autonomous and using his reason will never come to the knowledge of the wisdom of God. It can't and God has done this on purpose, to shut up all men in disobedience so He, by His grace and mercy might save some, but it's going to be by pure grace. Paul says **"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN**, that last part, things which have not entered the heart of man means things no man ever thought of, the solution to how God would solve man's problem of sin was never a thought in the mind of any human being who ever walked the face of the earth. Nobody ever had this idea arise in their thoughts. And the reason is quite simple, God kept it concealed until the proper time of revealing it. Now the end of the verse says **THAT GOD HAS PREPARED IT FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM**. And that's the second person plural, that is all believers, the knowledge of the wisdom of God, in Christ and His cross is for all believers, but it was not revealed to all believers, it was revealed to the prophets by the Spirit. But the point is that the prophet's responsibility was to tell it to others so it could be the joy of every believer.

Just like Deuteronomy 29:29 says, this is the NT equivalent of the OT saying, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." God has only revealed certain things to us through the prophets and once those things are revealed now those things are ours, those are for us, He prepared those things for us, but the secret things, those things do not belong

to us, they belong to Him. So I'm saying that vv 7, 8, 9 and 10 are the equivalent of this OT Deut 29:29, that there are things God has now revealed through Paul, Apollos and Peter, but before they were kept hidden, now they are for us to enjoy.

Verse 10, **For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; that's direct revelation**, *not* to all believers to receive that, to us prophets, Paul says! And I can prove that because verse 13 says what? How does it start? **which things we also speak**, well why would Paul and Apollos and Peter need to speak the things revealed to the Corinthian's if the Corinthian's received direct revelation? See, it doesn't fit. The we and the us refer exclusively to Paul, Apollos and Peter in this context.

Now you've probably never heard this passage taught this way before and I will tell you this is not anything I've heard Ryrie or Dean or Thieme teach and it's not in any commentary I ever read. Pieces of what I'm saying, yes, but the whole enchilada, no. But the point is I've been thinking about this text for years but I never had the chance to go verse by verse from the very first verse in 1 Cor and work up to this point seeking to understand Paul's argument. So I've been looking forward to it to be honest with you and now that I have, I look at the interpretations I've heard and read and none of them were saying what the text was saying, and they hit some pretty greasy spots in their exegesis in verse 6 and 10 and 12. I'd listen to them and think, some things are right about what they're saying but some things are not quite right, then I'd look at another interpretation and I'd think the same thing, some things are right about this approach too but some things are also wrong, it doesn't fit Paul's argument, it doesn't fit the grammar. Emphasis is being laid where it's not in the Greek text. So I went back to the drawing board and just broke everything down and re-built everything. And this is what I came to: in the flow of Paul's argument Paul has destroyed human wisdom as being the source of knowledge in 1:17-2:5. Now that we know that human wisdom is not the source of knowledge what is? Divine revelation. That is Paul's argument. I've told you where the source of knowledge is not, human reason; now I will tell you what the source of knowledge is, divine revelation and God chose me, Apollos and Peter to reveal it to you. There's nothing special about me that makes me better than Apollos and there's nothing special about Apollos that makes him more special than Peter. Christ who revealed Himself to us is the one that matters.

Verse 11 and we'll conclude today with this verse, **For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** It's a very simple argument; I don't know what you are thinking inside of yourself and I can't know that if you don't tell me. Now if you tell me I can know, but if you don't say anything I can stare at you forever and never know for sure what's going on inside of you. That is hidden from me, you're the only human who knows what's going on inside of you. And in the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. If God doesn't reveal Himself to us we can't know anything about Him. We can sit there and contemplate our navel but we're not going to know anything about God unless God's Spirit reveals God's thoughts. So that's the flow of Paul's argument and that is precisely where he is headed in verse 12, this wisdom of God was revealed to them by the Spirit of God. It's really that simple.

Let's conclude by summarizing: 1 Cor 2:6-11 teach that knowledge is hidden in God until He plans to reveal it to prophets who He chose before time for this honorable estate. He revealed it to them by means of the Spirit of God who knows the depths of God, who in turn had the responsibility to speak and preach the things of God to people. 1 Cor 2:14, 15 and 3:1 then tell how the message is received by people, there are three basic responses to God's revelation; first there is the natural man, he's an unbeliever, he rejects the word of God; second there is the spiritual man, a believer who has accepted the authority of God in every area of life, who has learned to walk by the Spirit, and has grown to maturity; and third, there is the believer who is an infant, who has not fully accepted the authority of God and still holds out that the world has some answers to life, who is therefore still walking according to the flesh.

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