

1 CORINTHIANS 2

1 Corinthians 2:1

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 151.

Paul begins this chapter by noting that he came to Corinth proclaiming the “mystery of God” (BYU Rendition). Many of his readers, coming from a pagan background, would have, as Paul intended, tied the word to the rites practiced by certain religions whose initiates were given secret knowledge that pertained to the gods and their work with humankind. Those who received such knowledge were known as *οἱ τέλειοι* (*hoi teleioi*), “the perfected,” and their esoteric knowledge was not to be shared by those outside the religious order. Here, in contrast to members of those religions, Paul shows that he presented the Christian mystery openly to all who would hear.

Paul’s method of presentation was very deliberate. In no way was he, through clever words and high-sounding phrases, going to overshadow the message. He understood that the Sophists were more anxious to please their hearers than to present the truth. Not so with Paul. The message, not the one who delivered it, was all-important.

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 152–153.

Paul refused to adopt the cajoling and wheedling methods used by most and, particularly, the more aggressive verbal bullying and demagogic tactics used by many. His objective was to let truth speak for itself,

not to manipulate his audience through clever rhetorical speech or intimidating displays of oratorical power. Paul's method was grounded in his Jewish background and understanding. Power came from God through seeming weakness.¹ Paul's words made it plain to the Corinthian Saints that the clear and demonstrative "proof" (ἀπόδειξις, *apodeixis*) of the gospel came not in external manifestations of verbal eloquence but only by the power of the Spirit. It was on this that their initial faith was born and on this which they must continue to rely.

1 Corinthians 2:5

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 153–154.

Paul's concluding clause, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5), states clearly Paul's purpose in both the form his message took and how he delivered it. In modern times, the Lord has confirmed the same means: "You shall have power to declare my word in the demonstration of my Holy Spirit" (Doctrine and Covenants 99:2). Paul's methods were meant to disarm the effective force of the worldly wise and influential and bring his listeners to trust in God and Christ alone and completely. That trust, however, was not based on his words, his personality, or the words of anyone else. It was based on the power of the Spirit that came upon them when they heard and exercised faith in the message.

1 Corinthians 2:6–8

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 158–159, 161–162.

Paul is very forthright in telling his readers his message is not for all. Indeed, only the spiritually mature (τοῖς τελείοις, *tois teleiois*) are in a position to really understand and embrace it. Since Paul's term *teleios* (given its technical nuance) applied to those initiated into the mystery religions, it hints to a Christian mystery that centered on sacred rites not shared with the world through which the Christian came into full fellowship and maturity with other Christians. By this means they come to know, at least in part, "the deep things of God" (see 1 Corinthians 2:10). These deep things include the means God had ordained for the salvation of his children.

The nuance of the Greek word translated as "this world" (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, *tou aiōnos toutou*) is of an age and, therefore, Paul was not referring to the earth but to the present world order. This period, he knew, was going to come to an abrupt end. The reason for its demise was that this order was not self-sustaining and, therefore, could not endure. Giving the verse this apocalyptic nuance suggests that

Paul knew that in God's own time, the present order would be replaced with one that was eternal. Therefore, Christians must not anchor themselves to it.

Paul admitted that the gospel, referencing as it did the wisdom of God, could only be described as mysterious. The Greek term *μυστήριον* (*mystērion*), unlike the English word "mystery," did not denote that which was impenetrable because it was inherently unintelligible or incoherent. Rather, it pointed to that which was too profound for human ingenuity and could not be obtained by unassisted human logic or reasoning. It could be gained only by the Spirit. Once disclosed, however, it made perfect sense to the spiritually mature. For those living in the last days, the Lord has promised that as His prophets abide in Him, he will give them "the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed, even things which were from the foundation of the world, and the things which shall come from this time until the time of my coming" (Doctrine and Covenants 35:18).

Paul's detractors insisted that they were the spiritually elite who understood the things of God better than he. They complained, therefore, that his doctrine was milk compared to the meat they had. (In chapter 3, Paul will address this attitude directly.) The problem with Paul's detractors was that in their self-reliant claim to special wisdom, higher spirituality, and superior spiritual gifts, they had become blind to the fact that they had been seduced by a false wisdom, one anchored in the present world order that actually put them in deadly spiritual peril.

Using acute irony, Paul demolished both their false boasting and imprecations. He showed his readers that these people were not as spiritual as they claimed. Indeed, they had missed the point in not seeing the cross for what it was—namely, an expression and revelation of the superior wisdom of God. This oversight had made them incapable of making proper judgments. As a result they were, like those in the world, pursuing wisdom but of the wrong kind. Ironically, their supposed spirituality was, in reality, not spiritual at all.

1 Corinthians 2:9–10

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 172.

The very essence of spirituality and the key that unlocks the door to understanding the things of God is love, especially love directed toward Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). To those who fully love, the Father is willing to reveal the mysteries of His kingdom, or as Paul describes them, "the deep things of God."²

1 Corinthians 2:12

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 173–174.

In verse 12, Paul speaks of the “spirit which is of God.” Since this “spirit” stands in contrast to the “spirit of the world,” the term is not, as in other cases, referring to the Holy Spirit, or more precisely, the Holy Ghost. Rather, it denotes the more abstract power and influence that centers in God and emanates from Him.

Paul was anxious that the Christian Saints partake of this spirit and not be filled with that of the transitory world. Indeed, if they were to be saved, he knew it was critical that they desist from thinking in worldly terms. Only through this wondrous spirit can they understand God’s ways. Paul’s words testify that God has already, through His graciousness (*χαρίζομαι*, *charizomai*), given certain Saints an understanding of these things. The central message, of which the Spirit bears record and the ground for the “deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10), is the revelation of the plan of salvation in which the Atonement of Christ plays such a central role. Such an understanding includes the loving ways of God and how far He is willing to go to save His children. As Paul’s fellow Apostle John testified, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This is the major point Paul’s detractors needed to more clearly understand.

1 Corinthians 2:15–16

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 175–177.

The adversative *δέ* (*de*), “but,” in the first line of verse 15 emphasizes the contrast Paul is going to make with the natural man mentioned in the first line of verse 14. The natural man is, by his self-imposed limitations, unable to discern and, therefore, judge (*ἀνακρίνω*, *anakrinō*) the things of God and His people because they can be understood only by the Spirit. The spiritual person, on the other hand, not binding himself to the transitory and temporal, can discern (*anakrinō*) godly things. It is important to understand, however, that it is the Spirit who “searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,” not the Saints (1 Corinthians 2:10). No mortal, no matter how righteous, can know all the ways of God. Some things simply remain outside of the Saints’ purview. The righteous, however, can know much. There is one part of the mystery, though, that all the Saints have access to, and this is Paul’s point: they can understand the plan of salvation and the central role of Christ therein. For the natural man, however, these things are foolishness.

The second line stands in contrast with the first and reverses its image. Paul plays on the same word used in the first line, *ἀνακρίνω* (*anakrinō*), “to discern, judge.” The natural man cannot discern or judge correctly the spiritual man, while the spiritual man, who can fully understand the profane and temporal world order, can discern and properly judge those therein.

The third line gives scriptural support to Paul’s point in the second line. To get his point across, the Apostle reworks Isaiah 40:13, turning it into a rhetorical question: “Who can know God’s mind and counsel Him?” The implied answer is no one. Paul’s point is that no sensible person would want to match wits with God.

With the final line, Paul returns to the point of the first one. He explains exactly why he and those who follow him can properly discern and judge: “We have the mind of Christ.” Here the nuance of the word “mind” (*voŷς, nous*) appears to refer to the Savior’s thoughts as revealed to the righteous by the Holy Spirit. The word “mind,” therefore, does not look to the instrument of thought but at the mode of thought. It encompasses the whole range of inspired ideas and beliefs that provide the basis for proper judgment and action.

Notes

- 1 Compare Exodus 4:10; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6; see especially Isaiah 53.
- 2 1 Corinthians 2:10; see Doctrine and Covenants 6:7, 11; 42:61–65.

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