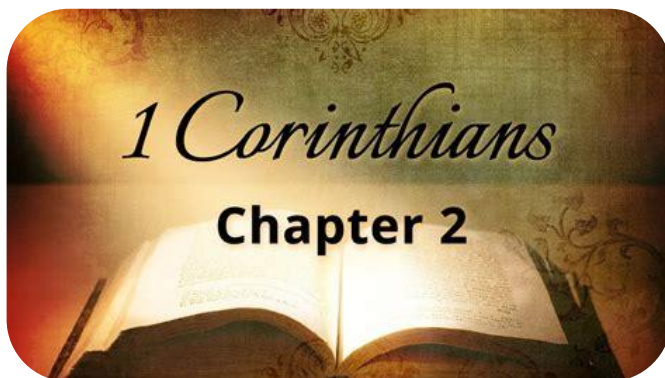


1st Corinthians Chapters 2-3

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Introduction:

- Chapters 2 and 3 have few verses, so we will combine them.



PAUL'S PLAN TO PRESENT CHRIST

(1) When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. (2) For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the One who was crucified.

- Paul first preached here without relying on oratorical skills. His presentation was *content centered* with the total focus being on **Jesus Christ** rather than **lofty words** and **impressive wisdom**. The Greeks were intoxicated with their eloquence. Even today a few preachers want to **impress** their listeners with their grand vocabulary and superior **wisdom**. Paul said to himself “**forget** that.”

(3) I came to you in weakness -- timid and trembling. (4) And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. (5) I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

- Paul **preached** in this great center of sin feeling **timid** and even **trembling**. The Lord had to intervene with His frightened man:

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent!" (Acts 18:9 NLT)

This happened at Corinth!

- Rather than rely on his presentation skills, he relied on the **power** of the **Holy Spirit**. This, in turn, caused his new Corinthian brethren to **trust in God's power** instead of **human wisdom**.
- **Paul Butler** offers a perspective for our times:

There were no public relations "advance-men," paid exorbitant salaries to create an "image" for Paul. There were no huge musical ensembles, with their amplifiers, microphones, spotlighting, and staging accompanying Paul (desensitizing men's minds so they could not think about what Paul was preaching).

WISDOM FROM THE SPIRIT

(6) Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten.

- The true message of Jesus relies on **words of wisdom**, but **not the kind** used by **world rulers**. The **rulers** of this **world** and their **wisdom** are **soon forgotten**. It is impossible to know the mind of God until God reveals it

through the men He has prepared and endowed -- His apostles.

(7) No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God -- His plan that was previously hidden, even though He made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.

- **God** has had a plan for saving mankind that reaches back before Eden. He revealed its existence to *Eve*, hinted of it to *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*. *Joseph* knew that something great was coming and *Moses* knew of a better time ahead. But its exact description remained a **mystery**.

(8) But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord.

- **The rulers of this world** include the Jewish **rulers** and Roman **rulers**. Both groups were involved in seeing that Jesus was **crucified**. None of the **rulers understood** the mystery of God. Man may discover the *existence* of God through His creation. Man may know from his conscience that he is *guilty* and *deserves punishment*, but he can only know about the *salvation* that comes through Christ by someone qualified to preach it.

(9) That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."

- The human mind could never arrive at God's marvelous mystery unaided. This was spoken by Isaiah:

When You came down long ago, You did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations. And oh, how the mountains quaked! For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like You, who works for those who wait for Him!

Isaiah 64:3-4 NLT

Unaided, man could never discover that God in His grace would develop a plan to care for man's guilt and then pay the bill Himself. This is **love** beyond explanation.

SPIRITUAL THINGS TO SPIRITUAL MEN

(10) But it was to us that God revealed these things by His Spirit. For His Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets.

I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. Ephesians 3:9 NLT

- Some teachers see the mystery as being **revealed** at the end of time, but Paul is **revealing** the mystery in his own time. The **secrets** of **God** were **revealed** through the Apostles so the "us" in verse 10 must be the Apostles.

(11) No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.

- For every person the rule is that only they, in their **spirit**, **can know** their thoughts. The same is true for **God** -- only the **Spirit of God** can know the **thoughts** of **God**.

(12) And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

- Paul makes the claim of having **God's Spirit** and access to **God's** plans. Is he saying that all believers have received **God's Spirit**? No, he is writing to believers and has a laundry list of things that need to be corrected.
- He is referring to himself as an apostle having the truth of the **Spirit**.

The Twelve Apostles of Jesus were given the ability to present God's will to others.

But when the Father sends the Advocate as My representative -- that is, the Holy Spirit -- He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

(John 14:26 NLT)

Jesus was, in essence, giving the Twelve His power-of-attorney.

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future. (John 16:13 NLT)

(13) When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.

- Even his choice of **words, his vocabulary**, does not reflect the world's wisdom but those of the **Spirit**. Even in reading the written word in our time, it is important to use words with the definitions used by the Holy Spirit (regardless of what language we use).
- Paul is speaking of verbal inspiration. We must use care even though 2,000 years have passed since the final part of the Scriptures was written.
- It is clear that our scriptures reflect the personality and background of the human writer, so God blended the personality of the writer with the truth the **Spirit** had to convey.

(14) But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.

- We need to look at our world and the universe God's way. Unless we do, God's message **sounds foolish** and nonsensical.

(15) Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. (16) For, "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach Him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

- **Paul Butler** describes this section:

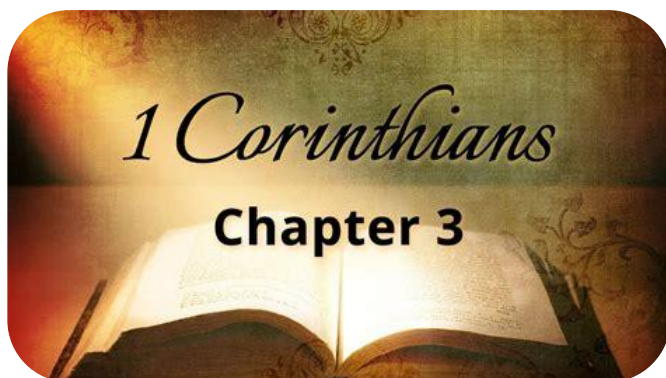
The Spirit-filled one (Gr. pneumatikos), the apostle (remember the continuity of antecedents) discerns and discriminates what the mind of God is and how God wants it taught, and teaches all things as God's Spirit chooses to reveal them.

The apostles, borne along by the Spirit of God, examined and discerned the deep things of the mind of God and then spoke them in language that could be understood by the human mind.

Thus, Paul is saying, "We inspired apostles so have the mind of God through the revelation of the Spirit that we are united in Him teaching His will as no uninspired ("natural") man could ever do." The second sentence of this verse leaves no doubt that Paul's subject here is divine revelation, not spiritual maturity.

- Paul quotes from Isaiah:

Who is able to advise the Spirit of the LORD? Who knows enough to give Him advice or teach Him?
(Isaiah 40:13 NLT)



THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF GOD

(3:1) Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life.

- When Paul launched the Corinthian Church, they were all **infants** in their faith. He had to talk to them from a viewpoint of them belonging to the world. They were babes.

(2) I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, (3) for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

- They haven't grown any and Paul still must talk to them as the babes that they are. They haven't been eating right. His evidence is their **jealousy and quarreling**. Jesus had made a similar comment to His Twelve before they received the Holy Spirit:

There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. (John 16:12 NLT)

Following this comment from Jesus, the Holy Spirit came on them, giving them the heavenly powers-of-attorney. Now, back to the Corinthian church:

(4) When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world? (5) After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

- Paul reminds them about their claims to follow **Paul** and **Apollos** in chapter one. They are acting just **like people of the world**. **Paul** and **Apollos** were only doing what the **Lord** had assigned to them. It's ridiculous to divide the household over the **servants** in it.

(6) I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. (7) It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

- Using an agricultural metaphor, Paul had the assignment of **planting** the **seed** of the word in their **hearts** while **Apollos watered** the plant, but it was **God** who made it **grow**.

(8) The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. (9) For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

- **The one who plants** and **the one who waters** are unified in **purpose** and will each be **rewarded**. They are both **workers in God's field**.

- The Corinthian church is a **field** and it is a **building**, to use another figure of speech.

THE FOUNDATION AND THE BUILDERS

(10) Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. (11) For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have -- Jesus Christ.

- Paul remembers that he used to be an enemy of God, but the Lord saved him by **grace**. The Lord used him as an **expert builder** to lay the **foundation**. Now others have raised a structure, but each must use care to **build** on the **foundation** that is **Jesus Christ**. That **foundation** is lasting.

(12) Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials -- gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

- The person who **builds** on the **foundation** that is Christ can choose what kind of building materials to use. **Gold, silver and jewels** are very desirable, but **wood, hay and straw** will not last over time. **Paul Butler** describes the problem at Corinth:

Some of the Christians of the congregation in Corinth were beginning to teach and lead in building the church. But it was evident to Paul that care was not being taken in their building. They were producing disciples who were jealous, indifferent to immorality in the church, bringing litigations against one another in pagan courts, careless about marriage, uncaring about weaker brethren, disrespectful in the corporate worship of the church and toward God ordained structures of human authority, both prideful and envious in the matter of supernatural gifts, teaching confusion about the bodily

resurrection, and slack in matters of Christian stewardship.

The teaching leadership of the Corinthian church was constructing God's building with weak and unendurable material, They were not building up Christian people who had strong, self-disciplined, servant-minded faith in Christ and his Word.

(13) But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. (14) If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. (15) But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

- We think of the **judgment day** as being at the end of time, but it may be a **day** *within* time when a person's work is tested by events.
- **Paul Butler** holds this view:

The trials of the Christian life (whether persecution or temptation) will prove not only what the material (disciple) is, but it will also prove how careful the builder (teacher) has been with the material.

The "day" will disclose each teacher's work! Temptations, trials and tests of faith are very revealing. Every preacher, Sunday School teacher, Christian parent, elder, deacon, and Bible college teacher who has ever sown the seed of God's word anywhere will have his work tested.

WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS

(16) Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? ~~(17) God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.~~ (Below - Next)

- Every believer must realize that *collectively* we are the **temple of God** and that the Holy **Spirit** lives in us. We are subject to punishment and destruction if we don't conduct ourselves properly in the **temple**. (The Holy Spirit at the *personal level* is discussed in chapter 6.)

(17) God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

- God was not offering a free pass of grace to those who purposefully divided the **temple**, the body at Corinth.

(18) Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. (19) For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, "He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness." (20) And again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise; He knows they are worthless."

- Self-delusion is serious. There isn't a way to make a sound decision if we can't identify reality. The Corinthian believers couldn't see the real world. The wisdom of the world was making **fools** out of them. The Old Testament speaks to that in two places, one in Job and one in Psalms:

He traps the wise in their own cleverness so their cunning schemes are thwarted. (Job 5:13 NLT)

The LORD knows people's thoughts; He knows they are worthless! (Psalms 94:11 NLT)

(21) So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you -- (22) whether Paul

or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, (23) and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

- The Corinthians were trying to *achieve status* by following their chosen leaders. They missed seeing their *true status* that God has given them. Everything belongs to them already and they belong to Christ. And Christ belongs to God. Don't give up your God-given status by **following** a mere man.