

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

Verse 10 declared that God revealed to the apostles, through the Spirit, the things He had prepared, and that the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. Verses 11 through 13 complete the paragraph. Verse 11 gives the reason the Spirit is the only possible means of that revelation. Verse 12 states what the apostles received and for what purpose. Verse 13 states what they did with what they received. The three verses lay out a single line from God to the hearer: God revealed, the apostles received, the apostles speak.

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. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:11-13)

EXPOSITION

Verse 11: “For Who Among Men Knows the Thoughts of a Man”

Verse 11 gives the ground of verse 10. Verse 10 named the Spirit as the one through whom God revealed and the one who searches the depths of God. Verse 11 explains why no other route exists: knowledge of what is within a man belongs to his own spirit, and knowledge of what is within God belongs to the Spirit of God.

The word “thoughts” is supplied in translation. The Greek reads only “the things of the man” in the first clause and “the things of God” in the second. The phrase is broader than thinking. It covers everything within a man that is his own: his purposes, his intentions, his assessments, his plans. The same construction in the second clause reaches back to “the depths of God” in verse 10. The things of God are His own counsel, purpose, and evaluation, what is within God as distinct from what can be observed of Him.

The Comparison

The first clause is a comparison from ordinary life. Among men, no one knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him. Another person can watch what a man does and hear what he says and still not know what is within him. The things of a man become known to someone else only when the man himself discloses them, and the means of disclosure is words. A man’s intentions reach another person when he puts them into speech.

This is the truth the comparison carries about a man’s spirit and God’s Spirit. The comparison does not describe God’s Spirit speaking privately to the believer’s spirit. It describes who knows. A man’s spirit is the only knower of the man; God’s Spirit is the only knower of God. And as a man’s inner things are known to others only when he speaks them, God’s inner things are known to men only

when His Spirit speaks them. Verse 13 states that this is what happened: the things were spoken “in those taught by the Spirit.” The comparison of verse 11 already points to the words of verse 13.

“Even So the Thoughts of God No One Knows”

The second clause is not a simple repetition of the first. Two changes sharpen it.

First, the verb changes. The human clause uses οἶδα oida, knowledge possessed. The divine clause uses γινώσκω ginōskō in the perfect tense: no one has come to know, no one stands in the condition of having arrived at knowing. This is the verb traced from verse 8, where the rulers of this age had not come to know the wisdom of God, and it returns in verse 14, where the natural man cannot come to know the things of the Spirit. Verse 11 states the principle that stands under both: no one has ever reached the things of God by coming to know them from outside.

Second, the subject widens. The human clause asks “who among men.” The divine clause says οὐδεὶς oudeis, “no one,” without qualification. It is broader than humanity. It excludes the rulers of verse 8 and whatever powers stood behind them. Nothing created has access to the things of God except as God discloses them.

What the Comparison Does Not Teach

Because the verse sets the spirit of a man beside the Spirit of God, some have read it to mean that the Spirit is in God what a man’s own spirit is in a man, the Holy Spirit is not a faculty He is also God. The point of the comparison is the exclusiveness of the knowing, not the nature of the knower. The surrounding verses describe the Spirit acting as an individual: He searches (verse 10), He is received from God (verse 12), and He teaches (verse 13). The Spirit knows the things of God because He is God; He does not examine God in order to know Him.

Verse 12: “Now We Have Received”

The pronoun is written out and placed first: ἡμεῖς hēmeis, “we.” Greek does not need the pronoun, since the verb already carries the person, so its presence is emphatic. It picks up ἡμῖν hēmin, “to us,” of verse 10. The “we” who received are the “us” to whom God revealed: the apostolic company, the same “we” who “speak wisdom” in verse 6 and who “speak” again in verse 13.

The verb is λαμβάνω lambanō, to receive, in the aorist, presenting the reception as a completed act. It stands beside the aorist of verse 10. God revealed; the apostles received.

“Not the Spirit of the World”

Before naming what the apostles received, the verse names what they did not receive. “The spirit of the world” (κόσμος kosmos) is the governing outlook of the world, the framework of evaluation that belongs to the age whose rulers are passing away (2:6). It is the outlook of 1:21, where “the world through its wisdom did not come to know God,” and the adversary’s influence stands behind

1 Corinthians Lesson 15

1 Corinthians 2:11-13

it, “the god of this world” who “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The apostles’ knowledge of God’s things did not come from that source. The world’s framework could not have produced it, because it is the framework by which the rulers crucified the Lord of glory (2:8).

“But the Spirit Who Is from God”

The preposition is ἐκ ek, “out of,” marking source. The Spirit the apostles received came out from God. That is why He could make known the things of God: the one who searches the depths of God is the one sent from God to the apostles. The Lord had promised this to the Eleven: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26). The promise was made to the men who would speak the apostolic word, and its verb, to teach, is the root of the word in verse 13.

“So That We May Know”

The ἵνα hina clause states the purpose of the reception: “so that we may know.” The purpose is knowledge, content that can be known and stated. And the verb of knowing is οἶδα oida, the same verb verse 11 used of a man’s knowledge of his own things. What was known to the Spirit of God alone is now known to those to whom He made it known.

“The Things Freely Given to Us by God”

The verb is χαρίζομαι charizomai, to give freely, to grant as a favor, built on χάρις charis, grace. What is named here was given, not earned and not reached. It is granted by God as a gift.

With this phrase the glory thread receives its fourth term. The wisdom was predestined “to our glory” (verse 7); the rulers crucified “the Lord of glory” (verse 8); God prepared the things no eye, ear, or heart had reached (verse 9); and now those things are called “the things freely given to us by God” (verse 12). Three verbs with God as subject run beneath the thread: God predestined (προορίζω proorizō), God prepared (ἐτοιμάζω hetoimazō), God freely gave (χαρίζομαι charizomai). The things prepared are the things granted. The glory planned before the ages is the glory bestowed.

The “us” who have been given these things is wider than the “we” who received the Spirit. Verse 9 names the recipients of the prepared things as “those who love Him,” which is every believer. The things were granted to all who love Him; the knowledge of what was granted came through the apostles, who received the Spirit so that they would know it and speak it.

The things freely given are not identical with the depths of God. The depths are God’s own interior, the whole of what the Spirit searches. The things freely given are what God has drawn out of that interior and handed across. Romans 11:33 still stands: “How unsearchable are His judgments and

unfathomable His ways!” What believers hold is genuine and sufficient, and it is also, in the language of this letter, known “in part” (13:12).

The verb λαμβάνω *lambanō* from this verse returns in 4:7 with one of the letter’s sharpest questions: “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” Whatever the Corinthians held, they held because it was granted and received by grace. Received things confer no rank.

Verse 13: “Which Things We Also Speak”

The relative pronoun (ὅς *hos*) stands in the neuter plural, “which things,” and its antecedent is the things freely given. The content spoken is the content granted. The καί *kai*, “also,” adds the next step: the apostles not only know these things, but they also speak them.

The verb is λαλέω *laleō*, to speak, in the present tense, and this is the third time it has carried the apostolic “we” in this paragraph: “we do speak wisdom” (verse 6); “we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery” (verse 7); “which things we also speak” (verse 13). The paragraph opens and closes on the apostolic speaking, and between the two stands the account of where the speech came from. God revealed (verse 10), the apostles received (verse 12), the apostles speak (verse 13). The unveiling and the reception are stated as completed acts; the speaking is stated in the present, a current or perpetual work of the apostles among the churches.

“Not in Words Taught by Human Wisdom”

The apostolic speaking is described first by what it is not. διδακτός *didaktos* is a verbal adjective, “taught,” and the genitive noun that follows names the teacher: words that human (ἰσθῶπιος *anthrōpinos*) wisdom teaches. The concern is not only what is said but where the words themselves come from.

This phrase closes a thread that has run since 1:17. Paul was sent to preach the gospel “not in cleverness of speech” (wisdom of word - σοφία *sophia* joined to λόγος *logos*). At 2:1 he came “not with superiority of speech or of wisdom.” At 2:4 his message was “not in persuasive words of wisdom.” Each time the text set aside a wisdom of words. Verse 13 names what stood in its place. The alternative to words taught by human wisdom was never an absence of words. It was words taught by the Spirit.

“But in Those Taught by the Spirit”

The same verbal adjective stands in the second half: words taught by the Spirit (πνεῦμα *pneuma*). The Spirit is the teacher, and what He taught reached to the words. The Apostles were not given the things of God as ideas and then left to find their own words for them. The words in which the things were spoken were themselves taught by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians Lesson 15

1 Corinthians 2:11-13

This is the text's own statement of how revelation became Scripture. The same account is given of the prophets: "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21). The origin of the prophetic word, as of the Apostolic word, was not the man. "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16), and 1 Corinthians 2:13 shows that the communication of God is through the Apostles in words.

Here also is the answer to claims of private revelation. The words taught by the Spirit were the words the Apostles spoke. A claim to have received new words from the Spirit for the church is a claim to stand where the Apostles stand in this verse. The apostles and prophets are the foundation (Ephesians 2:20), and a foundation is laid once. The believer does not receive revelation; the believer receives the words that were given by revelation.

"Combining Spiritual Thoughts with Spiritual Words"

The verse closes with a participial phrase describing the manner of the speaking. The participle is from συγκρίνω *sunkrinō*, and the two words beside it are both forms of πνευματικός *pneumatikos*, "spiritual," with no nouns expressed. Word for word the phrase reads "with spiritual, spiritual things combining." The NASB supplies "thoughts" and "words."

The verb has a range. Its basic sense is to bring together or combine. It can mean to compare, as in 2 Corinthians 10:12, where some "compare themselves with themselves." In the Greek Old Testament, it is the verb for interpreting a dream (Genesis 40:8). Because of that range, and because the first "spiritual" can be read either as neuter (spiritual things) or masculine (spiritual people), the phrase is rendered two main ways. The NASB reads "combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." Others read "interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people," looking ahead to the spiritual man of verse 15.

The NASB rendering fits the best. The whole verse has been about words: not words taught by human wisdom, but words taught by the Spirit. The first "spiritual" stands directly after "words taught by the Spirit," and the natural reading carries that subject through. The apostles set the things the Spirit gave into the words the Spirit taught, content and expression from the same source. The spiritual man is named in verse 15 but it is not the topic here.

What the Apostles spoke originated with the Spirit, in its content and in its wording, and nothing in it came from the wisdom of men.

From God to the Hearer

Verses 10 through 13 now lay out the whole line. The things of God are His own (verse 11). The Spirit, who alone knows them, searches all of them (verse 10). God revealed them through the Spirit to the Apostles (verse 10). The Apostles received the Spirit from God so that they would know

1 Corinthians Lesson 15

1 Corinthians 2:11-13

what God had freely given (verse 12). The apostles spoke those things in words the Spirit taught (verse 13). At no step does human faculty contribute: eye, ear, and heart were closed (verse 9), the rulers did not know (verse 8), and no one has known the things of God unless they are revealed.

The last step is where the hearer enters. The Apostolic words were spoken to the churches and written for them, and verse 14 turns to the one who hears them: “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.” The widening from the Apostolic “we” to believers generally begins here, at the point of hearing. The Corinthians did not receive revelation. They received the Apostolic word, as Apollos did, who “had been instructed in the way of the Lord” and was taught “more accurately” (Acts 18:25-26). That is the position of every believer since.

SUMMARY / APPLICATION

The line from God to the hearer bears directly on how believers know, how they regard what they know, and how they handle it.

The things of God are known where God has spoken them. Verse 11 closes every other door. If no one has known the things of God except the Spirit of God, then no believer reaches them by intuition, experience, impression, or imagination. They are reached where the Spirit put them, in the words. The believer who wants to know the depths of God opens the book that holds the words the Spirit taught and reads it from cover to cover.

What we know was received, and received things are not a rank. The things are freely given, and the knowledge of them came through the Apostles. No believer holds anything of God that he did not receive (4:7). A believer who has studied longer holds more of what was given, and he holds it as a gift and as a steward, not as a mark of standing over those who hold less.

The words deserve care because the Spirit taught the words. If the Spirit’s teaching reached to the words, then close attention to the words is not an academic exercise laid over the text. Grammar, tense, word choice, and the order of a sentence are the form in which the Spirit’s content was delivered. Reading closely is how the believer receives what was given precisely and accurately.

The teacher is a steward of delivered words, not a source. “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (4:1-2). The Apostles were stewards of what they received. Those who teach after them are stewards of what the Apostles delivered. The teacher’s task is to teach accurately what is written, and the hearer’s task is to test what he hears by what is written. The written word is authority since it is the Word of God.

Verse 14 turns from the speaker to the hearer. The same words are received by one man and refused by another, and the text locates the difference.