

1 Corinthians 2

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the profound contrast between human wisdom and the divine wisdom found in the message of the cross.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1

Topics: "Divine Wisdom", "The Cross"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the apostle Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 2, where he sets aside human wisdom and focuses solely on the message of the cross. Paul acknowledges his own weakness and fear, presenting Christ crucified as the central theme of his preaching, which contrasts sharply with worldly wisdom. He explains that the cross reveals God's wisdom and brings an end to human pride, highlighting the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in understanding divine truths. Darby notes that true spiritual maturity comes from recognizing our standing in Christ and the revelation of God's mysteries through the Spirit. Ultimately, he asserts that the cross is the ultimate answer to human sin and folly, leading believers into a new creation in Christ.

Transcript

In chapter 2 we have the apostle's use of what precedes, and it is remarkable how he sets man aside altogether, and then takes the ground, that when he came to this wise people he knew nothing but the cross, and not only this, but that, looked at as a man, he was in weakness himself, and in fear, and in much trembling. He has only the foolishness of the cross, and his speech and preaching are not with man's wisdom, that their faith might stand in the power of God.

In the first five verses we have Paul coming to sinners - his way with these wise ones. There was neither excellency of speech nor wisdom to man's eye. It is not strictly the cross of Christ but Jesus Christ, the positive fact of preaching Christ; and then he takes Christ in the lowest and most degraded way, Christ and Him crucified. The preaching of the cross is not exactly the same thing, but the point is that he was not reasoning philosophy with them but preaching Christ and then, if you take up Christ, it is in this way, as crucified man.

It is difficult for us, used as we are to look upon the cross as redemption, to feel what the effect was on a number of philosophers, what it was to go and say, There was a man gibbeted in - ; trust him. To man it was the grossest folly that could be. And see, it is Jesus Christ, His Person here, He crucified. He adds, "which none of the princes of this world knew," or "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," v. 8.

Because He was that, you get His Person, and not merely the fact of the cross. And it is a very strong thing to put before man; it is what wrote folly on their wisdom and on the grandeur of this world.

The moment man is a sinner, it is another thing altogether; and, the infinite love of God coming in and speaking to man as man, what comes of all grandeur and of all wisdom and of all else? The whole of man in flesh is swept away by it. All that flesh could glory in is there totally put an end to. There is no kind of fleshly glory in the cross whatever. It was God's wisdom to do this: no dignity, no heroism, but shame, reproach, ignominy, and death; it is all of man brought down to where nothing could be found - no, not a stone to put his foot on, to keep it out of the water. None but slaves were put upon the cross, and this is what God takes up to bring the world to nothing, first to nothing in judgment, and to nothing too, when we know He is in glory.

209 Then it brings forth God, man put out and God brought in. The moment I get that side, I have the Lord of glory, divine righteousness, divine wisdom. "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." First, he brings the cross to man in every shape and way, and when he has done that, he says, I have crucified you, and am coming to tell you what God is in doing so.

"Them that are perfect" in verse 6 are those that are brought by the cross into this new condition with God; it really is in resurrection if you come to examine it. They are grown men in that condition. What the apostle is looking at here is a person who had the flesh put down with death written on all; all brought into God's presence and all the world put an end to; there is a new state of things altogether; the beginning of the new creation; what the Holy Ghost reveals and the Lord of glory. It is that the person is brought into the state that the cross brings into. You do not begin expounding blessedness and glory to a person who wants his conscience reached; but the contrast here is the world and the man who has been brought out of the flesh into God's place of blessing in the new creation. "Perfect" is in contrast with carnal and babes in chapter 3:1; it is the full-grown man. Judaism was flesh in that sense of the word: "as unto babes in Christ" is another thing. You have three things, carnal men, natural, and spiritual men. You may meet a person you cannot concur with because, though having the Holy Ghost, his practical state is "carnal," yet not "natural."

In Galatians the apostle says, "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all"; but here he is talking of Christianity in so low a state that he could not talk with them of certain things. As to knowledge they were "perfect," but in practical state he could not deal with them as such. I believe there are real Christians who are not perfect in this sense. If one does not know the forgiveness of his sins, he has not the consciousness of his new standing and is not perfect. The apostle is here speaking of their standing, he is taking up the question of those who had God's wisdom instead of man's. When he came to sinners, he preached Christ crucified; and when he had people in a Christian state, he speaks of all the fruits in glory. When he says, "Ye are carnal," it is the particular state of certain Christians who ought to be up to the measure of their standing, but are not.

210 "The wisdom of God in a mystery" (v. 7) is all that is unveiled of His counsels in Christ; everything that God has done in Christ. If they had seen all the glory of God in Christ, they would not have hung Him on the cross. They crucified the Lord of glory, but they would not have done it, had they known. Verses 9 and 10 are in contrast with the Jewish state of things, "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." There you get the Jew, the prophet declaring that it had not entered into man's heart; "but God hath

revealed these things unto us." In the Old Testament these things were not revealed, but now they are. He is speaking of the whole Christian condition and not of the state of the individual, and he takes up the Christian therefore in his full character, and not in his gradual progress, or in his faulty want of development. Verse 9 is often quoted as of present application to the Christian, but the apostle is quoting it to shew what is not the Christian state; for to us God has revealed these things by His Spirit.

In verse 10, etc., you get three distinct steps: the Spirit of God revealing, whether to Paul or others; then the Spirit of God communicating what was revealed; and last, the receiving by the Spirit. The Holy Ghost in us searches all things; there is nothing hid. The prophets searched "what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify"; having the Spirit they began searching out. It is the Spirit in us who searches. There is a power of the Holy Ghost to give all the counsels of God. You find elsewhere that the Spirit of God is identified with the person He dwells in. He makes intercession for the saints to God; Rom. 8. I have not the word only, but the Spirit within me, and the mind of the Spirit according to God.

As to man, what man knows the things passing in his mind? Only the spirit of the man knows; now we have the Spirit of God, and He knows the things of God, and therefore we know them. Paul then goes on to unfold this. It was revelation to Paul and communication by Paul in the words of the Spirit, and the reception spiritually by spiritual men. To this we may add having the mind of Christ, which should be common to all Christians. There is what I have somewhere lately called the intelligent and the intelligible. The intelligent is capacity without a thought, but add the intelligible and you have the thought as well as the mind. So we have revelation first; then the words were adequate; and then the third thing that through the Spirit I receive it. I know people talk about inspiration, and of Shakespeare being inspired and so on; it is all very well, but did such men have a revelation - a positive new thing from God? The first thing is revelation; what is called inspiration is not so clear. It is possible I may have a revelation from God and never say a word about it. Paul had a revelation and told us nothing about it. Inspiration is an ambiguous word altogether, and people may be deceived by it; but when it comes to a positive revelation, men know they have no place at all in that. Then the Holy Ghost forms the communication too. It is like a fountain, the water is the same, and it comes out as it went in.

211 I do not think "comparing" in verse 13 is right at all. It is "communicating" spiritual by spiritual; he has the Holy Ghost's words and communicates the Holy Ghost's words, and that whether he be writing or preaching. There may be things which I am quite sure of, but which I may put in a way that is not the Holy Ghost's way. When Paul was preaching, it was not "comparing" at all. "We speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." In speaking I speak as from God, or else I ought to hold my tongue. "If any man speak; as oracles of God." This does not mean according to scripture, but as from God; of course it will be according to scripture, but that is not the thing there. This strikes at everything that is of man. "He himself is judged of no man," in verse 15, is man as man in contrast with the Holy Ghost.

In the last verse we have the same contrast with the Old Testament: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" and in answer to the challenge of the prophet it is, "but we have the mind of Christ." If I have Christ's mind, I have the thoughts that are in it and all that is included. We have not the divine mind abstractedly, but we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us; and then comes all the revelation of the mystery.

212 I must bring the cross to a poor sinner whoever he is. A person's cleverness will not answer in the day of judgment; the cross is the answer of divine wisdom. Suppose he had made all the telegraphs in the country, when he is dead, what becomes of them to him? God will give you, not cleverness in your mind, but the Holy Ghost, and the truth of God, and the mind of Christ. John says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." And there is no part of God's counsels that is not now brought into light. As to this the intelligent and the intelligible go together; with us creatures, you cannot get the capacity without the thought.

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