

LESSON 220

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

Related Scripture: I Corinthians 1:10-31

KEY VERSE: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."—James 3:17.

Lesson Scripture: I Corinthians 2

Introduction:

Wisdom, we may say, is not merely knowledge but also and especially the ability to make good use of the knowledge we have. We may have knowledge without wisdom, but we cannot imagine wisdom without knowledge.

Since human knowledge is fragmentary and human desiderata are various, human beings differ among themselves as to the nature of true wisdom. Even on the human level, one man's wisdom is another man's foolishness.

Much greater must be the difference between human wisdom and divine. Quite often man's wisdom is foolishness to God and God's wisdom is foolishness to man, either because of the difference between human ignorance and divine omniscience, or because of the difference between human wickedness and divine righteousness. Even when man knows how to get what he desires, he generally desires the wrong thing.

Philosophical thoughts like these may help to prepare our minds for the religious reasonings of the first three chapters of I Corinthians. The inspired apostle had had his fill of worldly wisdom, and had found something infinitely better in Christ.

Satan's seminarial sycophants may learn too late that in the light of eternity the simplicity of the veriest babe in Christ is more wise than all their mis-called "liberal" theology.

Taking I Corinthians 2 for our lesson this week, we note:

1. Christ Crucified, I Cor. 2:1-5
 - a. Determination in preaching, 1-3
 - b. Demonstration of power, 4, 5
2. Christ Concealed, I Cor. 2:6-8
 - a. Wisdoms opposed, 6
 - b. Wisdom ordained, 7
 - c. Wisdom outraged, 8
3. Christ Concealed, I Cor. 2:9-12
 - a. Barrier to blessings, 9, 11
 - b. Bearer of blessings, 10, 12
4. Christ Complete, I Cor. 2:13-16
 - a. In testimony, 13
 - b. In transmutation, 14
 - c. In transfusion, 15
 - d. In transcendence, 16

Notes on the Printed Text:

Christ Crucified, I Cor. 2:1-5.

Full gospel preaching must include the proclamation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the scripture. (I Cor. 15:1-8, 11.) But as rebellious sinners are reconciled to God through the death of His Son, so reconciled sinners are saved in His life: therefore as doctrinal and edificatory preaching must emphasize Christ resurrected and living, so evangelistic preaching must emphasize Christ crucified for sinners.

Determination in Preaching, 1-3.

Paul was an effective instrument in the service of God because he was a willing instrument. It was God that called him (I Cor. 1:1), and his preaching was "the testimony of God," but our text declares that Paul decided or determined to know no other message than that which God had given him to bear. It was not from lack of natural ability but from his own choice that he "came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom."

"Jesus Christ, and him crucified" was the substance of Paul's preaching in his missionary or evangelistic labors. Of course, this does not mean that the apostle merely parroted a formula of a few words over and over again. The historical facts and the doctrinal implications of the character and crucifixion of Christ provide abundant material for a lifetime of preaching.

But Paul determined not to be distracted from the central theme of his mission. He was most anxious to please the Lord Whom he served, and in that anxiety he was conscious of his own weakness so that he served in fear and trembling, fearing not man but God.

Demonstration of Power, 4, 5.

Having renounced "enticing words of man's wisdom," Paul was able to demonstrate the Spirit and power of God. Let every minister of the gospel, every believer in Christ, prayerfully examine his own heart. Is it our desire to be known as great preachers or great Christians, or are we content to be humble servants of the great God?

Christ Concealed, I Cor. 2:6-8.

"The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (Jn. 1:5.) God manifested His presence among men in the person of His Son, but the world at large remains ignorant of the true character of Christ. He is spiritually revealed to believers but concealed from unbelievers—concealed, that is, not by any lack of revelation, but by the spiritual blindness of those who will not believe.

Wisdoms Opposed, 6.

Among the "perfect," among God's people (perfect in Christ), wisdom is something quite different from the wisdom of this world and of the princes or rulers of this world. These rulers "come to nought" in time, while the saints of God shall reign forever: so eternity will prove which is the true wisdom.

Wisdom Ordained, 7.

Divine wisdom is hidden in Christ (I Cor. 1:24, 30). Divine mysteries can be partly known and understood by finite minds when and to the extent that God is pleased to reveal them to us. One fact revealed about this wisdom "in a mystery" is that God ordained it "before the world," or more literally, "before the eons." We have just recently learned it, but it was with God from eternity. Moreover, He ordained it "unto our glory."

Wisdom Outraged, 8.

Only God knows in any case to what extent sin is an expression of willful rebellion against the Creator and to what extent it is a result of ignorance. Wicked as they were, the rulers of this world did not know that hidden wisdom of God by which they might have understood the full enormity of their crime in crucifying the Christ. They knew that they were doing wrong; they knew that they were murdering an innocent man under the pretense of legal judgment; but they did not know that He was the Lord of glory. If they had known, they would not have committed the greatest outrage in the history of the world.

Christ Concerned, I Cor. 2:9-12.

All true knowledge and understanding of things as they are, all true wisdom in ordering conditions and events, all the love and concern to set things right, are with God and can come only from God. Christ is concerned for the salvation of His enemies, as was evidenced on the cross and is declared in His word. (Lu. 23:34; Ro. 5:6-8; I Jn. 4:9-11.)

Barriers to Blessings, 9, 11.

Spiritual blindness, spiritual deafness, spiritual hardness and deadness of heart, are the barrier to "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Men are shut off from salvation not by any deficiency in divine love, but by their own sinful nature.

Another way to describe the barrier between man and God is to point out that only the human spirit can know human affairs; so likewise only the divine Spirit can know "the things of God."

Bearer of Blessings, 10, 12.

So only the Spirit of God can bring to us a knowledge of the things of God. He knows all things, and when we have received Him into our lives we have acquired in Him the power to "know the things that are freely given to us of God."

Christ Complete, I Cor. 2:13-16.

In Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him." (Col. 2:9, 10.) We might have all things without Christ and have nothing; but in Him we have everything.

In Testimony, 13.

Faithful witnesses for Christ are not dependent on human wisdom for their words of testimony. The Holy Spirit knows and can teach us the best words to use for every occasion.

In Transmutation, 14.

Nevertheless, even though we compare or interpret spiritual things with spiritual words, "the natural [soulic] man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; there must be a transmutation or transformation of character for mortal man to receive the things of immortal life.

In Transfusion, 15.

The spiritual man has received a transfusion of the Spirit of God. He now partakes of the divine nature, and is now able to judge of things hitherto unknown, while he himself, having subjected himself to a higher Judge, has in a sense risen above the jurisdiction of human judgment.

In Transcendence, 16.

This verse explains the preceding verse. In our new life we transcend the bounds of the old life. By a rhetorical question the apostle suggests what a ridiculous idea it is that a creature should undertake to instruct the Creator. "But we have the mind of Christ," the Creator. Therefore on the highest plane we do not get our instruction from men, but from God. (I Jn. 2:27.)

Key Verse:

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."—James 3:17.

Since there are two kinds of wisdom, and only the wisdom from above will stand the test of eternity, we need to be sure that we have this wisdom, rather than that which is described as "earthly, sensual [soulic], devilish." The Biblical descriptions are clear enough; a little intelligent observation is enough to tell the difference.