

The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: God's Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1–3:23

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These two chapters press one great question: where does true wisdom come from, and on what does saving faith rest? What is doctrinally at stake is the source and sufficiency of divine revelation. Paul insists that the gospel is not human insight dressed up in eloquence but a wisdom God hid for ages and has now revealed by his Spirit through the apostles. The teacher should help students see that this is the foundation for the authority and sufficiency of Scripture: the same Spirit who searches the depths of God taught the apostles the very words in which the message is delivered (2:13). What the apostles wrote is not their opinion but God's revelation, and the completed New Testament is now our standard (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Take care, especially, to present the Spirit's work here as the revealing of God's word through the apostles, not as a warrant for present-day new revelation or private mystical insight.

At the same time, Paul is not writing an abstract lecture on epistemology. He is rebuking a proud, divided, immature church and calling it to grow up. The chapters move from the mind (where wisdom comes from) to the heart and life (stop quarreling, build carefully, honor God's temple). So the lesson aims at formation: a faith that rests securely on God's power rather than on impressive personalities, and a maturity that puts an end to jealousy and party spirit.

Aim, then, at both confidence and humility. Send students home assured that in Scripture they hold the very wisdom of God and the mind of Christ, and send them home sobered about the immaturity that still shows up as rivalry, and earnest to build a life on the one foundation that will survive the fire.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says he came to Corinth "in weakness and in fear and much trembling," and that his message and preaching were "not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (2:3–5). Why was it so important to Paul that the Corinthians' faith rest on God's power rather than on human eloquence?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene in Corinth, a city that prized rhetoric and rewarded slick speakers. Paul's choice to come "in weakness and in fear and much trembling" was deliberate and counter-cultural. He refused to compete on the world's terms.

Explain Paul's reasoning in 2:5. A faith propped up by human eloquence rests on a shaky foundation, because someone more eloquent can always come along and topple it. A faith born of the demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God rests on God himself.

Note that Paul is not against careful teaching or clear speech; he reasoned ably elsewhere. What he refuses is to let the gospel's success depend on human cleverness rather than on the truth and power of the crucified Christ.

Bring it to the present. Churches still face the temptation to draw crowds with performance and personality. Paul's example calls us to make Christ crucified, not the messenger's polish, the heart of what we offer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saving faith resting on the power of God, not on human eloquence (2:5)
- The gospel's power located in the message of Christ crucified, not in the skill of the speaker
- The danger of a faith built on personality, which collapses when a more impressive figure appears
- Clear teaching valued, but never as a substitute for the Spirit's demonstration and power
- Christ crucified as the irreducible center of preaching

Discussion Prompts

- Why would Paul intentionally set aside the rhetorical skill that Corinth admired?
- What is fragile about a faith that rests mainly on a gifted speaker?
- How can a church value good teaching without drifting into performance?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul deliberately set aside the kind of impressive presentation that would have won him a following in Corinth. Where are you tempted to build your faith, or your sense of a good worship service, around what is polished, entertaining, or impressive, rather than around the plain truth of Christ crucified? How might that leave your faith fragile?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns Paul's example onto our own preferences. Many of us, often without noticing, evaluate worship and faith by how engaging or impressive they are.

Help students name the subtle forms this takes: choosing a church mainly for its production quality, losing interest when the teaching is plain, measuring a service by how it made us feel rather than by whether Christ was exalted and the truth was taught.

Connect this back to fragility. A faith fed only on stimulation grows weak when the stimulation stops, in seasons of plainness, suffering, or routine. A faith fed on Christ crucified endures.

Aim for one honest adjustment. Ask students where they could trade a craving for the impressive for a deeper hunger for the truth of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Evaluating worship by entertainment value rather than by the exaltation of Christ
- The fragility of a faith dependent on stimulation
- Hunger for the plain truth of Christ crucified as a mark of maturity
- Discernment between what is merely impressive and what is spiritually nourishing

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you catch yourself wanting the impressive over the true?
- How does a faith built on performance hold up in a dry season?
- What would it look like to hunger more for Christ than for a good show?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul speaks of “a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory,” which “none of the rulers of this age understood, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (2:7–8). What is this hidden wisdom, and how does the cross show that God’s wisdom is utterly different from the wisdom of the world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open up the “secret and hidden wisdom of God.” This is not esoteric knowledge for an inner circle; it is the gospel plan of salvation through a crucified Messiah, purposed by God before the ages and now made known. It was hidden in the sense that human wisdom could never have guessed it and the prophets only glimpsed it from afar.

Draw out the irony of 2:8. The rulers of this age, with all their power and sophistication, crucified the Lord of glory precisely because they could not perceive God’s wisdom. The cross they meant as defeat became God’s triumph. Worldly wisdom was exposed as blindness.

Contrast the two wisdoms clearly. The world prizes strength, status, and self-advancement; God’s wisdom saves through a Savior who is humbled, rejected, and crucified. The cross is the great dividing line between the two.

Help students marvel rather than merely understand. This is wisdom “for our glory.” God’s hidden plan was aimed all along at bringing us to glory in Christ. That should move the heart, not just inform the mind.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as God's wisdom hidden for ages and now revealed (2:7)
- The cross as the supreme display of a wisdom the world cannot grasp
- Worldly wisdom exposed as blindness in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory (2:8)
- God's saving plan purposed before the ages for the glory of his people
- The cross as the dividing line between human wisdom and divine wisdom

Discussion Prompts

- What is the hidden wisdom Paul says God has now revealed?
- How does the crucifixion show the blindness of worldly wisdom?
- Why does God's wisdom so often look like foolishness to the world?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul writes that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard ... what God has prepared for those who love him" (2:9). When you consider what God has prepared for those who love him, how does that hope reshape the way you are spending your one short life right now? Where are you living for what you can see rather than for what God has promised?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the glorious promise of 2:9 and lets it press on how we live now. What God has prepared surpasses anything our senses have taken in, and it is reserved for those who love him.

Help students feel the reorienting power of that hope. When the best is still to come, and it is beyond imagining, we are freed from clutching at this life as though it were all there is.

Probe gently where students live by sight. Are we investing our deepest energies in what we can see, accumulate, and control, while treating the things God has promised as an afterthought?

Aim for a concrete shift in priorities. Ask each student to name one way the hope of what God has prepared could change how they spend this week, this paycheck, or this season.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The surpassing hope of what God has prepared for those who love him (2:9)
- Living by faith in God's promises rather than by sight
- Hope as a force that reorders present priorities
- Love for God as the posture of those who inherit his promises

Discussion Prompts

- How does the promise of 2:9 change the way you view this present life?
- Where are you living mainly for what you can see?
- What is one priority this hope would rearrange this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul explains that “the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God,” and that “no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God,” so that what we know of God’s wisdom comes by the Spirit’s revelation (2:10–13). How does this passage teach us where true knowledge of God comes from, and what does it mean that the apostles spoke “in words ... taught by the Spirit”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a doctrinally weighty question about the source of our knowledge of God, so give it room. Paul’s argument is that the deep things of God are known only because God’s Spirit, who alone searches and comprehends them, has revealed them.

Trace the chain Paul builds: the Spirit knows the mind of God; the Spirit revealed these things to the apostles; the apostles spoke them “in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit” (2:13). The very words of the apostolic message are Spirit-given, not merely the ideas. This is the foundation of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Guard carefully against a common misuse. Paul is describing how God revealed his word through the apostles, not promising every believer fresh private revelations or mystical downloads. That apostolic revelation is now complete and written; the New Testament is our standard, able to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). We do not look for new revelation beyond it.

Stress how this protects us. Because our faith rests on God’s own revelation given through the Spirit-taught apostles, it does not depend on human speculation or shifting opinion. We can have confidence that in Scripture we hear God truly.

Bring it home. The practical question is whether we will submit to God’s revealed word as the authority, or sit in judgment over it with our own reasoning. Paul calls us to the former.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Holy Spirit as the one who knows and reveals the deep things of God (2:10–11)
- The inspiration of the apostolic message, taught “in words” by the Spirit (2:13)
- Scripture as God’s revelation, the basis of its authority and trustworthiness
- The completed New Testament as our sufficient standard, with no need for new revelation (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

- Submitting our reasoning to God's revealed word rather than judging it by human wisdom
- A clear guard against claims of present-day private or mystical revelation

Discussion Prompts

- According to Paul, how do we come to know the thoughts of God?
- What does it mean that the apostles spoke in words taught by the Spirit?
- How does this passage support our confidence in the authority of Scripture, and why do we not look for new revelation beyond it?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul contrasts "the natural person," who cannot accept the things of the Spirit and finds them folly, with the spiritual person, who has been given understanding (2:14–16). In what areas do you still find yourself thinking like "the natural person," evaluating God's ways by mere human reasoning? Where do you most need to submit your thinking to the revealed mind of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the contrast between the natural and the spiritual person inward. We can be Christians and still, in stubborn pockets, evaluate God's ways by merely human reasoning.

Help students identify those pockets honestly: where God's commands seem unreasonable to us, where we quietly think we know better, where we trust our gut over God's revealed word.

Clarify what Paul does and does not mean. The natural person is not unintelligent; the point is that spiritual realities are discerned only by those taught by the Spirit through the word. To grow is to bring more and more of our thinking under the mind of Christ (2:16).

Aim for one act of submission. Ask each student to name an area where God's word and their own reasoning currently disagree, and to choose to trust the word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The natural person versus the spiritual person in discerning God's ways (2:14)
- Having the mind of Christ through the revealed word (2:16)
- Submitting human reasoning to God's revelation
- Maturity as the steady surrender of more thinking to Christ's mind

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you still evaluate God's ways by mere human reasoning?
- What does it mean in practice to have the mind of Christ?
- Name one area where you need to trust God's word over your own instinct.

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their jealousy and quarreling and asks, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed." He adds, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (3:4–7). What does this teach about the proper place of human leaders in the church and about who deserves the glory for any spiritual fruit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring out Paul's deflating of the personality cult. Apollos and Paul are not rival headliners; they are servants, field hands, through whom the Corinthians came to believe. The image is humble on purpose.

Highlight 3:6–7. One plants, another waters, but God gives the growth, so neither the planter nor the waterer is anything; only God who gives the growth matters. All glory for spiritual fruit belongs to God alone.

Apply this to how we regard leaders. We can be grateful for faithful preachers and teachers without idolizing them or forming parties around them. They are servants of God and of us, not celebrities to be followed.

Apply it also to those who serve. Anyone who teaches, leads, or labors in the church must remember they are only servants and that growth is God's gift. This kills both pride in the worker and rivalry among workers.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Church leaders as servants of God, not celebrities to be followed (3:5)
- God alone giving the growth and receiving the glory (3:6–7)
- Gratitude for faithful workers without forming parties around them
- Humility in those who labor, knowing the increase is God's
- The cure for the party spirit that divided Corinth

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul's image of planting and watering reframe the role of leaders?
- Who really deserves the glory for spiritual growth, and why?
- How can we honor faithful teachers without idolizing them?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul warns each builder to “take care how he builds” on the foundation, because the Day will test each one’s work with fire (3:10–15). When you think about how you are building your life on Christ, are you building with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and straw? What is one area where you want your work to last?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the image of building on the foundation and makes it personal. Christ is the only foundation (3:11), but how we build on him matters enormously.

Explain the testing fire of the Day (3:13). Our work will be revealed for what it is. Some materials survive the fire; some are consumed. Paul is sobering, not crushing: the builder whose work burns up may still be saved, “but only as through fire” (3:15).

Help students think concretely about gold versus straw. Are we investing in what is eternal, faith, love, obedience, souls, or filling our lives with what will not survive God’s testing? Mature Christians build to last.

Aim for one durable investment. Ask each student to name one area where they want to build with gold rather than straw, and what that would require this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the only foundation for a life or a church (3:11)
- The testing of every believer’s work by fire on the Day (3:13)
- Building with what endures versus what will be consumed
- Sober motivation toward faithful, lasting work without despair

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to build on Christ with gold rather than straw?
- How does the coming testing of our work shape today’s choices?
- Name one area where you want your work to last.

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul declares, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” (3:16–17). What does it mean that the church is God’s holy temple where his Spirit dwells, and how seriously does this passage say God takes those who would damage his people through division and strife?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Paul declares that the church, the gathered people of God, is God's temple, the very place where his Spirit dwells (3:16). Under the old covenant God dwelt in a building; now he dwells in his people.

Stress the corporate sense here. While 6:19 speaks of the individual body as a temple, in 3:16–17 Paul is addressing the congregation: “you” is plural. The Corinthians, as a body, are God's holy temple, and the division they are causing is an assault on that temple.

Take seriously the severity of the warning: “If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him” (3:17). Division, jealousy, and quarreling are not minor faults; they damage something holy that God loves, and God will hold accountable those who tear at his people. This raises the stakes of the whole letter's concern with unity.

Connect this to the New Testament picture of the church. The Lord's church is not a human organization but God's dwelling, built on Christ the foundation, indwelt by his Spirit, holy because he is holy. To belong to it is a high privilege; to harm it is a grave sin.

End with a pastoral turn. The right response is reverence: to treat fellow believers, and the unity of the body, as holy. We guard our words, our loyalties, and our attitudes because we are handling God's temple.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as God's temple, the dwelling place of his Spirit (3:16)
- The corporate, congregational sense of the temple here (the plural “you”)
- The gravity of division as an assault on something holy (3:17)
- God's holiness as the reason the church must be treated with reverence
- The church as God's dwelling built on Christ, not a mere human institution
- Reverent treatment of fellow believers and of the unity of the body

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the church is God's temple where his Spirit dwells?
- Why does Paul attach such a severe warning to those who damage that temple?
- How should the holiness of the church shape the way we handle conflict and loyalty?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these two chapters. Paul moves from the foolishness of the cross, to the hidden wisdom revealed by the Spirit, to the warning against dividing God's temple, and ends with “all things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (3:21–23). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to gather the sweep of the passage and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak before you summarize.

If they need help, recall the movement: the foolishness of the cross as God's power, the hidden wisdom revealed by the Spirit, the call to maturity, the warning against dividing the temple, and the soaring conclusion that all things are theirs because they are Christ's and Christ is God's (3:21-23).

Linger on that final note. Paul reverses the Corinthians' boasting. They said "I belong to Paul." Paul says no, everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ. To be Christ's is to have everything; there is nothing left to boast in but him.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would build on the one foundation and treasure their belonging to Christ this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Belonging to Christ as the ground of true security and freedom (3:21-23)
- Personal formation through the truth of God's wisdom and power
- Maturity that puts away rivalry and builds on the foundation
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this passage pressed on you most, and why?
- What does it mean for you that all things are yours because you are Christ's?
- What is the one truth from these chapters you most need this week?