

1 Corinthians 2:7-16

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11:42 AM

Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 2:7-16 has been largely misunderstood by the religious world. It has been misused by Calvinists to teach that the unsaved cannot possibly understand the will of God. After all, it does say that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God...neither can he know them" (vv. 14). Is that Paul's point here? Is he indeed supporting Calvinistic theology? It is true that this passage is somewhat difficult to understand, but it can be understood, and rest assured, it does not support Calvinism.

If we are going to understand this text, we must keep each verse in context. Let's begin in verse seven and proceed to the end of the chapter.

In verse seven, Paul says that he spoke "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom" and then in verse eight, "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." The apostle here is speaking of the very gospel of Christ; the revelation of the New Testament. To better understand this point, let's consider Ephesians 3:3-5: "How that by revelation, He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in a few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit..." The "hidden wisdom" of 1 Corinthians 2 is the "mystery of Christ" of Ephesians. They are one and the same. The redemptive story of Christ as well as the will of Christ were hidden during the Old Testament dispensation. But now it was being revealed unto the first century apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the things that were hidden in the Old Testament were revealed in the first century. And not only was the mystery being revealed, but it was being written by the apostles and read by the early Christians (Eph. 3:4). That is what Paul is writing about in 1 Corinthians 2.

Regarding this time of "silence" Paul says "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 are two key factors to the will of God: preparation and revelation. The "hidden wisdom" was *ordained* before the world. That is, God determined before the foundation of the world what He would do to redeem mankind once they have sinned (see Eph. 1:4-7 as well as 1 Pet. 1:19-20). In another place, Paul calls this the "eternal purpose" of God (Eph. 3:11). Again, this was a "mystery" during the Old Testament dispensation, but it had already been prepared and was still being prepared as the Old Testament unfolded. That is what 1 Corinthians 2:9 is saying.

But not only was this testament "prepared" but it was also revealed by the Spirit unto the holy apostles and prophets of the first century who then shared it with the other Christians (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:4-5). The mystery was unveiled. Again, it is important to note that the will of God was revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul illustrates the point in verse 11: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the Spirit of man which is in him?" In other words, the only one who knows what you're thinking is you. Likewise, "the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." No one can know the mind of God except the Spirit of God. That is why for so long it was "hidden." God's mind was active. His plan had already been ordained. But it was hidden from mankind. It was a "mystery." Just like your thoughts are unknown to others, so also were the thoughts of God a mystery to the world. Thankfully, God revealed His thoughts "by

His Spirit" (vv. 10). That is, the gospel of Christ and the New Testament pattern which were unknown for so long were now revealed! If they had not been revealed, we would to this day be ignorant of the mind of God.

In verse 12, Paul says that we have received the "spirit which is of God...that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." This point is a summary of what has already been said. The "hidden wisdom" was revealed through the Spirit, and therefore the blessings of God could be known and understood. These things that Paul was teaching were not derived from men, but from God (vv. 13).

The next verse in the passage is the one that provides the most difficulty. The inspired apostle says in verse 14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." This particular verse is the one most often cited to support the system of Calvinism. It is assumed that the "natural man" is so totally depraved from birth that he cannot possibly understand the things of God. But that is not what this is saying. Again, we must keep this verse in context. Paul is not discussing the ability of some to understand what has been revealed and the *inability of others* to understand that same revelation. Rather, he is discussing the ability of the saved to understand the revealed mind of God versus the *inability* of others to understand the mind of God *without revelation*. In other words, one cannot understand the mind of God unless he takes advantage of what God has revealed. God HAS revealed His will (vv. 10). It can be read and understood (Eph. 3:4). But if one does not read and receive the revelation of God, they cannot possibly understand the will of God! That is the point. The sensual man who revels in his own wisdom will not even consider the redemption story. It's not that he can't understand what the Bible itself says. It's that he refuses to even consider it!

To "know the mind of the Lord" and to "have the mind of Christ" (vv. 16), one must embrace what has been revealed by God through the Spirit. Without this revelation, we cannot read the mind of God nor can we know the things of God. The Calvinists are wrong in their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2. Paul is not saying that the unsaved are unable to understand the Bible. He is simply saying that unless we embrace what has been revealed through the Holy Spirit (the New Testament), we are doomed, for there is no other way to know the mind of God!