

3. God's Wisdom—Revealed by the Spirit (2:6-16)

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

*"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"^a—*

10 but¹ God has revealed it to us by his² Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit³ within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit,⁴ expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.^b 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God,⁵ for they

¹The NIV here reflects the text of NA²⁶-UBS³ (δέ), following \aleph A C D F G Maj latt sy. The γάρ of P⁴⁶ B 6 88 181 326 365 1739 1877 2127 2492 m sa bo^{mss} Clement is to be preferred on all counts. It is the *lectio difficilior* (a copyist would scarcely have deliberately created a text with three γάρ's in a row, whereas the substitution of a δέ for a γάρ would have been natural and could have been deliberate or accidental; see the note on v. 11); it fits Pauline style (cf. Rom. 15:3-4); and it makes better sense of the argument (see the commentary).

²The NIV is probably translating the τοῦ of τοῦ πνεύματος as "his." An αὐτοῦ does in fact appear in the majority of witnesses, incl. D F G latt (probably as a "translational" variant; i.e., a variant that came about through translation into Latin). The text without αὐτοῦ is supported by P⁴⁶ \aleph^* A B C 630 1739 1881 pc cop.

³A few Western MSS (F G a b Pel) omit the words τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, resulting in a text that translates "except the spirit (Spirit?) within him."

⁴The MajT, with no early Greek or versional support, adds ἁγίου to πνεύματος.

⁵On the basis of the citations from several Fathers, Zuntz, 221-23, argues that τοῦ θεοῦ is an interpolation (cf. the "C" rating in the UBS³). This illustrates a highly questionable use of patristic evidence to support a "shorter text" (cf. G. D. Fee, "The Text of John in The Jerusalem Bible: A Critique of the Use of Patristic Citations in New

are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things,⁶ but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?"^c

But we have the mind of Christ.⁷

^a Isaiah 64:4

^b Or *Spirit*, interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual men

^c Isaiah 40:13

To this point Paul has been rather hard on "wisdom"—because he is arguing against a Corinthian attitude toward it that has placed him and his gospel in a less than favorable light. But not all is pejorative. He also asserted that God acted by means of his own wisdom (1:21) and that he made Christ to become "wisdom" for us; but in so doing Paul transformed "wisdom" from a philosophical, rhetorical term into a historical, soteriological one (1:24, 30). Taking up the language of vv. 4-5 ("not in the persuasion of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power"), he now makes a turn in the argument in order to reassert that the gospel he preaches is in fact the wisdom of God. But it cannot be perceived as such by those who are pursuing *sophia*; it is recognized only by those who have the Spirit.

As with much of 1:18–2:5, the argument of this paragraph is full of bite. The Corinthians, enamored by wisdom and thinking of themselves as "spiritual," are less than enchanted with Paul's message, which they regard as mere "milk." With fine irony Paul demolishes these various misperceptions and false boastings. The gospel of the crucified Messiah is wisdom all right, he affirms, but not of the kind they are now pursuing. True wisdom is indeed for those who are "spiritual," for those who have the Spirit, who has revealed what God has really accomplished in Christ. Because they do have the Spirit, and thus the mind of Christ, they should have seen the cross for what it is—God's wisdom—and thereby have been able to make true judgments. By pursuing *sophia* they are acting just like those without the Spirit,

Testament Textual Criticism," *JBL* 90 [1971], 170-72). Not one of the patristic citations is more than probable; none is certain. Internal considerations support the full description, which is carefully balanced with what is said about the believer in v. 12. See the commentary.

⁶The majority of MSS replace the τὰ of τὰ πάντα with a μέν, thus conforming the πάντα to v. 10 and placing the emphasis on the second clause. See the discussion in Metzger, 547, and Zuntz, 109-10 and 198.

⁷A few MSS (B D* F G 81 it) replace Χριστοῦ with κυρίου, assimilating Paul to the citation of Isa. 40:13.

who are likewise pursuing wisdom but see the cross as foolishness. The net result—and the irony—is that they are “spiritual,” yet “unspiritual”; they are pursuing “wisdom,” yet missing the very wisdom of God.

The argument, which is in three parts, can be easily traced: (1) Vv. 6-10a set forth the nature of God’s wisdom in terms of the basic contrast between those for whom it was destined and those who cannot perceive it. God’s wisdom, predestined by him to bring *us* to glory, was therefore held “in mystery” (“secret”), hidden from the present age and its leaders. (2) Vv. 10b-13 explain how we are let in on the secret, and why the others are left out. We have received the Spirit, who knows the mind of God and has revealed to us what God is up to. (3) Vv. 14-16 conclude by reaffirming all this in terms of “natural” and “spiritual” people. The people of this age, who are pursuing mere “wisdom” and so consider the cross “foolishness,” do not have the Spirit; therefore, they cannot understand true wisdom (v. 14) nor make valid judgments (v. 15), an activity that is properly available only to those who have the Spirit. The paragraph concludes with a citation from Isa. 40:13, which offers biblical support for people’s inability to comprehend, a situation that is now reversed for those who have the Spirit and therefore the “mind of Christ.”

Despite what appears to be a simple—and explicable—turn in the argument, this paragraph has suffered much in the church, both at the hand of scholars and in popular preaching and Bible reading. The reasons for this have to do partly with the language (e.g., wisdom, mystery, hidden, rulers of this age, deep things of God, spiritual/natural man, the mind of Christ) and partly with the several *contrasts* set up both in this paragraph and in 3:1-4. As a result the paragraph has been variously viewed as an example of Paul’s playing the Corinthians’ game after all—that he really argues that those who are truly spiritual do possess a “deeper wisdom,” and that he thereby establishes two classes within the church—one “spiritual” and “mature”; the other “natural” (or “worldly”) and “immature” (or “babes”).⁸ But such a view runs counter not only to the argument as a whole

⁸This has taken several forms. Traditionally (e.g., Goudge, 16), Paul is seen to be arguing that despite what he has said in 2:1-5, he nevertheless does have “deep truth to reveal,” which “requires a developed spiritual character for its appreciation.” Those who continue to take some form of this approach see Paul as addressing a special group (“the mature” or “the spiritual”), the differences having to do with how the special group is perceived. See, e.g., Conzelmann: “The section is dominated by a pneumatic enthusiasm, a distinction between two classes. The pneumatics here do not comprise all Christians, but only a superior class” (p. 57); cf. R. Bultmann, “Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*,” in *Faith and Understanding* (ET, New York, 1969), pp. 70-72; and Wilckens, 52-96. R. Scroggs argues convincingly against Wilckens’s basic position (that Paul is here adopting the position of his Gnostic opponents and thus betrays his own theology), but continues to promote the idea that Paul “must have had an esoteric wisdom

(not to mention this paragraph), but also to the whole of Pauline theology. Indeed, such an argument would effectively destroy the very point of everything said in 1:18–2:5.⁹ Paul is not here rebuilding what he has just torn down. He is retooling their understanding of the Spirit and spirituality, in order that they might perceive the truth of what he has been arguing to this point.

While it is true that much of the *language* of this paragraph is not common to Paul, the explanation of this phenomenon is, as before, to be found in his using *their* language but filling it with his own content and thus refuting them.¹⁰ The theology, however, is his own, and it differs radically from theirs. For Paul—as for them—the Spirit is the key to everything. For him the Spirit is an eschatological reality, marking the turning of the ages. This becomes crucial for understanding the several *contrasts* in the passage. On the one hand, those who are still of *this* age, who have not received the Spirit, do not understand the wisdom of God in Christ crucified. But their wisdom is under divine judgment and already on its way out. Those who have the Spirit, on the other hand, have “the mind of Christ” and thus understand God’s activity, revealed to them by the Spirit. This is why Paul comes down so hard on his Corinthian friends. They do have the Spirit; they are part of the new age that God is ushering in. But their present conduct and stance toward wisdom betray them. Paul includes them among the “spir-

teaching entirely separate from his kerygma” (“Paul,” p. 35). Ellis, 25-26, on the other hand, sees Paul as addressing only the πνευματικοί here, who are defined as those who with Paul possess spiritual gifts. The position argued for in this commentary is in essential agreement with Funk, “Word,” pp. 275-305; cf. B. E. Gärtner, “The Pauline and Johannine Idea of ‘To Know God’ Against the Hellenistic Background,” *NTS* 14 (1967/68), 215-21; and J. Francis, “‘As Babes in Christ’—Some Proposals regarding 1 Corinthians 3.1-3,” *JSNT* 7 (1980), 41-60.

⁹Both Wilckens and Conzelmann admit this (see previous note). They see Paul as using the ideas and language of his opponents, or of a prior “schema,” which he fails adequately to integrate, thus creating tension or paradox. The logic of this position is finally taken by M. Widmann (“1 Kor 2:6-16: Ein Einspruch gegen Paulus,” *ZNW* 70 [1979], 44-53), who argues that the passage is a gloss introduced by Paul’s Corinthian opponents as a reply to Paul. See the response by Murphy-O’Connor, “Interpolations,” 81-84.

¹⁰Cf. Funk, “Word,” p. 300 n. 107: “Paul has simply turned their language, and thus their expectations, inside out in the interest of bringing them face to face with the word of the cross.” However, one must exercise due caution here—not every new term must come from them loaded with foreign nuances—but this seems to make the most sense of the data.

Both the source of their language and Paul’s use of it are hotly debated. Wilckens, Bultmann, and Conzelmann see it as Gnostic terminology that Paul has less than successfully incorporated so that he comes out looking far more Gnostic than Christian (see n. 8 above). Scroggs in particular has shown the weaknesses in this approach, especially as it appears in Wilckens. Others see the background as Jewish Hellenism of the type found in Philo; cf. Pearson, 27-37, and Horsley, “Pneumatikos.”

itual” (vv. 7-13), yet later addresses them as “fleshly” and “merely human” because their quarrels indicate that they are acting just like those who do not have the Spirit (3:1-4). The real contrast is therefore between Christian and non-Christian, between those who have and those who do not have the Spirit. Paul’s concern throughout is to get the Corinthians to understand who they are—in terms of the cross—and to stop acting as non-Spirit people. At the same time, as with 2:1-5, an unmistakable note of personal apologetic lies just below the surface, if not right in the open.¹¹

6 The “however”¹² that begins this sentence marks a decisive turn in the argument; but it also closely ties what follows to what has immediately preceded in vv. 4-5. Despite the insistence that his preaching was *not* with the “persuasion of wisdom” so that their faith might not rest on “human wisdom,” Paul says “we¹³ nevertheless do speak wisdom.”¹⁴ In so asserting, his first concern is to ensure that he is not misunderstood. By “wisdom” he does *not* refer to what is fascinating the Corinthians: wisdom that belongs strictly to this age and its rulers, who are already “coming to nothing.”

What, then, does he mean by “wisdom”? Whatever else, the emphasis now is on the *content* of *sophia*,¹⁵ not its *form*, as in vv. 1-5; nonetheless, he says very little that actually describes this content. The reason for this, of course, is first of all that Paul assumes his readers will pick that up from

¹¹It should be noted, finally, that those who see this section as a previously independent midrash, adapted by Paul to its present context (e.g., Wuellner and Ellis; see n. 1 on 1:18–2:5), seem to push the meaning of the term midrash beyond recognizable limits—not to mention rather generally miss the point of the paragraph in its present context. *Midrash* minimally means an exposition *based on* OT texts; the texts cited here are *not* the basis of the argument but are used as supporting evidence only and are in no way the crucial matter.

¹²Gk. δέ, clearly adversative here and thus rightly translated “however” (cf. “yet” in RSV, GNB, NAB).

¹³One of the commonly noted phenomena of this paragraph is the shift to the first person plural throughout. Some have argued that this signals a switch to a special group. See, e.g., Ellis, 24-26, esp. n. 17, who sees it as “the signature of pneumatics,” those special persons with “spiritual gifts.” But that is to make too much of a common Pauline feature (see, e.g., E. Stauffer, *TDNT* II, 356-58). The shift in this first instance (and in vv. 7 and 13) represents his common editorial “we,” and refers at least to Paul, and perhaps to other preachers/teachers. To that degree it therefore also reflects his underlying apologetic: “But despite what you may think, I do preach wisdom.” Beginning with “our” in v. 7, including “those who love him” in v. 9 and “to us” in v. 10, and continuing through “we” in v. 16, we meet a usage that Funk calls “inclusive-exclusive”; i.e., “on the one hand, it attempts to pull his readers into his own orbit, to embrace them, as it were, within the fold of the faithful. On the other hand, given the polemical context, it verges on exclusion,” which motif “erupts in 3:1f. as the singular” (“Word,” p. 300 n. 107; cf. p. 286 n. 46).

¹⁴For the structure of this kind of argumentation cf. 1:17 and 18, where the wisdom characterized by *logos* sets up the contrast with the *logos* of the cross.

¹⁵Hence the NIV’s addition, “the message” of wisdom.

1:23-24 and 30 (cf. 2:2). He has already declared: "We preach Christ crucified . . . the wisdom of God."¹⁶ That this is the basic thrust of its content is confirmed by the otherwise unnecessary reference to the crucifixion (not simply "killed") in v. 8. With a *crucified Messiah as its assumed content*, Paul's present concern is to explain the *nature* of this wisdom, which made it impossible for those in pursuit of merely human wisdom to recognize it as such.

What has caused some to think that Paul is dealing with "deeper truths" is the phrase "among the *teleioi* (mature),"¹⁷ which anticipates the "mere infants" of 3:1. Since Paul says that he speaks this "wisdom" among "the mature" and that he could not so address them, it is thus assumed that there are hidden depths of Christian truth that he did indeed possess, but kept to himself in Corinth because of their lack of maturity. But the rest of the paragraph indicates that such is not the case. The equation in 3:1, where "infants" is the opposite of "spiritual," indicates that the *teleioi* of this verse are those who have received the Spirit (v. 12) and are therefore the "spiritual" of v. 15. The argument of the whole paragraph, especially the language "for *our* glory" (v. 7), "for those who love him" (i.e., "*us*"; v. 9), "revealed it to *us*" (v. 10), and "we have received the Spirit who is from God" (v. 12), implies that Paul is, as earlier, addressing the whole church and drawing them all into the orbit of what he is saying. Most likely the terminology is theirs.¹⁸ In their rejection of Paul they think he is treating

¹⁶Scroggs, "Paul," pp. 35-37, tries to drive a wedge between Paul's "kerygma and his sophia," which he calls "clear-cut." While such a distinction might possibly be made, in the sense that the implications of what one "preaches" in order to evangelize might be more fully explicated when one teaches, to draw a sharp line between these in Paul is to miss rather widely his singular passion for the gospel. On this question see esp. Gärtner, "Idea," p. 219: "What is in view is not an intellectual or theoretical, rational knowledge as the Stoics would have understood it. It has nothing to do with an insight into God's secrets, disclosed in ecstasy or in a mystical way, as Philo explained Abraham's or Moses' knowledge of God. . . . *Sophia* is rather the profound content of God's revelation . . . [and] in one way can be identified with Christ the Son of God whose death on the cross was an essential expression of the 'depths of God'." See also the argument in Funk, "Word," pp. 291-94. Cf. Bornkamm, *TDNT* IV, 820: ". . . 2:6-16 remains within the sphere of the λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ. It is misleading to seek in this section thoughts which are not included in the *kerygma* itself."

¹⁷Gk. ἐν τοῖς τελείοις. Turner (*Syntax*, p. 264) suggests that the ἐν here could stand "pleonastically for the normal dat[ive], *to* or *for*." But as Barrett, 69, has pointed out, that does not at all accord with Pauline usage. Barrett's own distinction, that this "implies that all may speak" (as in 12:8), is not so apparent. On the use of "we," see n. 13 above. Paul probably intends nothing significant by this preposition except to describe those *among whom* God's wisdom is spoken.

¹⁸In this case it probably reflects either Hellenistic philosophy (e.g., Plato) or Hellenistic Judaism of the type found in Philo. See P. J. Du Plessis, *TEΛΕΙΟΣ: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen, 1959), pp. 36-121; cf. Pearson, 27-30, and Horsley, "Pneumatikos," 281-83, who opt for Philonic influence.

them like mere babes, feeding them only with milk, while they perceive themselves to have advanced to maturity (cf. 4:8). A similar usage in 14:20 suggests that “infants” and “grown-ups” is the basic intent of the imagery. Therefore, the usage is at least partly ironical. Those “in Christ” (1:30) are “the mature,”¹⁹ and thus the Corinthians are included. But their behavior indicates that they are very much mere babes. Paul’s concern, as in 14:20, is to persuade them to adopt the thinking that goes along with being “mature” in Christ.

The wisdom of which Paul is now speaking, he is quick to reassert, is of a radically different kind from that which the Corinthians are currently pursuing, which is “of this age” (cf. 1:20). However, in this case he adds “or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” This latter verb is the eschatological one from v. 28; the “rulers of this age,” and therefore by implication the age itself, are “coming to nothing,” that is, they are in the process of “being abolished.” But who are the “rulers of this age”? and why are they brought in here? The answer to the second question is twofold: partly it anticipates what will be said in v. 8, where they represent the people of this age who fail to recognize the wisdom of God and who thereby stand in contrast to those who are destined for glory; but it also seems to reflect an early expression of the Christian *kērygma* as it was preached in the Pauline circle.²⁰ As to the first question, there has been a growing consensus over many years that the “rulers” are demonic powers,²¹ or at least that by these words Paul wants the Corinthians to see demonic powers as lying behind the activity of the earthly rulers.²² This oft-repeated assertion needs finally to be

It has also been common to see Paul as here influenced either by the terminology of the mystery cults (Reitzenstein, Bultmann) or by Gnosticism (Wilckens, Conzelmann) to refer to “the initiates.” But this has been effectively refuted by Pearson and others. The mystery rites never use this adjective in this way, and the data from Gnosticism are at least a century or more later.

¹⁹For this sense of the term, see esp. Du Plessis, *TEAEIOΣ*, pp. 178-85; cf. Weiss, 53.

²⁰See, e.g., Luke 24:20; Acts 3:17; 13:27 (note the “ignorance” motif in the latter two instances, both sermons). For this observation I am indebted to W. Carr, “The Rulers of This Age—I Corinthians II.6-8,” *NTS* 23 (1976/77), 20-35, esp. pp. 25-27.

²¹The literature here is immense. Among commentators, see Weiss, Moffatt, Lietzmann, Héring, Barrett, Conzelmann. Among others, see R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (ET, London, 1952), I, 259; Wilckens, 60-63; Scroggs, “Paul,” p. 41; BAGD.

²²This view is espoused by such various scholars as O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (ET, London, 1962), pp. 191-206; G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 80-82; G. H. C. MacGregor, “Principalities and Powers. The Cosmic Background of St Paul’s Thought,” *NTS* 1 (1954/55), 17-28; W. J. P. Boyd, “I Cor. 2:8,” *ExpT* 68 (1957), 158; and Bruce, 38. As Carr has pointed out, this view has almost nothing in its favor. Cullmann’s basis for so arguing rests on a faulty view of the angels of the nations; and the linguistic evidence itself is completely lacking.

laid to rest²³ since the linguistic evidence, the context, and Pauline theology all argue against it.²⁴ Given the evidence of v. 8, the “rulers” here at least include those responsible for the crucifixion. But in this first instance the term probably also intends the “leaders” of this age in the broader sense, including the various “wise ones” of 1:20 and 26. Those to whom the Corinthians would especially give deference do not really know true wisdom; indeed, they are themselves “coming to nothing.”

7-8 In these verses Paul elaborates the two sides of v. 6. V. 7 explains the *nature* of God’s wisdom that made it impossible for the wise of this age to grasp it; v. 8 repeats the failure of the “rulers” in terms of their responsibility for the crucifixion.

He begins with a sharp contrast to the negative side of v. 6. “No,”²⁵ he says, “we speak *God’s* wisdom,”²⁶ which he immediately qualifies in four ways. The first three describe its nature, so as to distinguish it from the wisdom of this age. First, it is wisdom “in mystery” (NIV, “secret wisdom”).²⁷ One cannot be certain whether this phrase modifies “wisdom” as

²³Despite the evidence against it, it will probably not die easily, since those interpretations that see Gnostic backgrounds to much of what is being said here are particularly dependent on this interpretation to make them work.

²⁴The linguistic evidence is decisive: (1) the term ἄρχοντες is never equated with the ἀρχαί of Col. 1:16 and Eph. 6:12; (2) when ἄρχων appears in the singular it sometimes refers to Satan; but (3) there is no evidence of any kind, either in Jewish or Christian writings until the second century, that the term was used of demons; and (4) in the NT it invariably refers to earthly rulers and unambiguously does so in Paul in Rom. 13:3. See G. D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 87-89. Some see the qualifier “of this age” to be determinative, since Satan is referred to in John’s Gospel as “the ruler of the world” (12:3; 14:30; 16:11); but that seems a remote connection at best, since the phrase in John belongs to his special vocabulary. Nothing like it appears in Paul (esp. not in Eph. 2:2). While the “powers” do play a significant role in Pauline theology, there is no evidence that they are responsible for the death of Christ; rather, Christ triumphed over them by his death (Col. 2:15). On this whole question see G. Miller, “APXONTΩN TOY AIΩNOY TOYTOY—A New Look at 1 Corinthians 2:6-8,” *JBL* 91 (1972), 522-28; and esp. Carr, “Rulers,” which also appears in somewhat abbreviated form in *Angels and Principalities, The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Use of hai archai kai hai exousiai* (SNTSMS 42; Cambridge, 1981), pp. 118-20.

²⁵Gk. ἀλλά, the strong adversative.

²⁶The θεοῦ is emphatic, θεοῦ σοφίαν; the genitive is probably possessive in this case, although it may also lean toward source, i.e., wisdom that not only belongs to God, but also comes from God. The NIV’s addition, “of” (God’s wisdom), is unnecessary and probably slightly misleading.

²⁷This is another phrase that has caused some to see Paul as reflecting the mystery cults or Gnosticism. But again that not only misses Paul’s own Jewish background, but the whole point of the argument as well. On the unlikelihood of the mystery cults influencing the NT at all, see G. Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries* (ET, Edinburgh, 1967). On the term “mystery” in Paul see R. E. Brown, *Semitic Background*; cf. G. Bornkamm, *TDNT* IV, 817-24: “In sum, μυστήριον . . . in the NT . . . betrays no relation to the mystery cults.”

an adjective (hence the NIV's "secret wisdom") or the verb "we speak" as an adverb.²⁸ The former seems preferable. God's wisdom is not some inaccessible teaching, spoken in secret. As Paul will develop more fully in Colossians and Ephesians,²⁹ in the singular the term "mystery" ordinarily refers to something formerly hidden in God from *all* human eyes but now revealed in history through Christ and made understandable to his people through the Spirit.³⁰ The seeds of this idea are sown here for the first time in Paul; in particular it embraces the paradox of the crucifixion of "the Lord of glory" (v. 8).³¹

Second, and to clarify the phrase "in mystery," God's wisdom—salvation through a crucified Messiah—"has been hidden." The perfect tense, plus the phrase that follows ("before time began"), indicates that such wisdom has been hidden in God from eternity until such a time ("now") as he was ready to reveal it. What follows in v. 8 suggests further that God's "secret" remains hidden from the "rulers," the representatives of the "wise" of this age.

Third, God's secret wisdom, long hidden—and still hidden to some—was "destined" by God himself "for our glory before time began." This is the clause that begins to clarify both the content of "wisdom" and the identity of the "mature" in v. 6. The verb "destined"³² is an intensified form of the ordinary verb for "determining." The emphasis lies on "deciding upon beforehand" (BAGD); therefore, to "predestine." As in 1:1, God's call is the expression of his prior will, which in this case is further intensified by the phrase "before time began" (lit. "before the ages"). What God determined "*before* the ages" has been worked out in the *present* age, which is being brought to its conclusion as the *final glorious* age has dawned and is awaiting its consummation—"for our glory." What has been predestined technically is God's wisdom; the larger context indicates that Paul has in view God's gracious activity in Christ, whereby through the crucifixion he determined eternal salvation for his people—including especially the

²⁸It would then refer to the *form* of the instruction that would be accessible to the τέλειοι, but inaccessible to the νήπιοι. As we have noted throughout, that is contextually an unlikely interpretation. For an advocacy of the adverbial understanding, see B. Frid, "The Enigmatic ΑΛΛΑ in 1 Corinthians 2.9," *NTS* 31 (1985), 605.

²⁹See Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19. In these letters "mystery" especially, though not exclusively, refers to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the salvation of God.

³⁰Three times in 1 Corinthians it appears in the plural (4:2; 13:2; 14:2). The latter two in particular reflect the idea of things still hidden, but revealed or expressed in the form of spiritual gifts. On the usage in 14:2 and 15:51 see the commentary *ad loc*.

³¹For further discussion of "mystery" in this passage and in Paul, see S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Tübingen, 1981), pp. 75-78.

³²Gk. προορίζω; cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5, 11; Acts 4:28.

Corinthian believers. Just as God *chose* the foolish and weak for salvation and thereby “shamed” the wise and powerful, who are being brought to nothing (1:26-28), so now Paul repeats that God “destined” his people for glory (not shame), and has done so in contrast to the rulers of this age who are “coming to nothing.” “For our glory” is eschatological language, referring to the final goal of salvation, namely that God’s people should share in his own glory.³³ Hence the crucified one is in this context also called “the Lord of glory” (v. 8).

Fourth (v. 8a),³⁴ God’s wisdom is something that “none of the rulers of this age³⁵ understood.” With this clause Paul elaborates the negative side of v. 6, but now in light of the preceding description of God’s wisdom. The reason for their failure is that it was “hidden in God” and could only be grasped by a revelation of the Spirit (v. 10). The reason for repeating this idea seems to be twofold: first, to reestablish the contrast between “us” and “them” that is crucial to his argument; and second, to confirm their part in the historical event itself, which both demonstrated their “ignorance” of God’s ways and implicated them in the carrying out of his plan.³⁶ What they did not understand was the nature of true wisdom—God’s wisdom, as spelled out in 1:18–2:5—which stands in contradiction to human understanding; and because they were thus “ignorant” they did what human “wisdom” demanded—they crucified the one who for them was one more messianic pretender. Thus the divine irony: The very ones who were trying to do away with Jesus by crucifying him were in fact carrying out God’s prior will—“destined for our glory before time began.” Instead of crucifying a messianic pretender, they killed “the Lord of glory” himself,³⁷ the very one

³³Cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:10, and esp. Rom. 8:17 and 8:29-30.

³⁴The NIV (correctly, given their translational theory of dynamic equivalency) treats v. 8a as a new sentence. In fact, it is a relative clause that marks the fourth qualification of God’s wisdom.

³⁵For the meaning of “rulers of this age” see above on v. 6.

³⁶Given this concern on Paul’s part to root God’s wisdom in the historical event of Christ’s death, and the rulers’ implication in that death, it is surprising to see this clause interpreted by some as the key to a Gnostic, mythological understanding of the whole passage. The “ignorance” motif is alleged to be a reflection of the Gnostic Redeemer myth, where the Aeons were ignorant of who Christ really was, namely “the Lord of Glory,” which is also seen as mythological language. For this view see especially Wilckens, 70-80; it is repeated in Conzelmann, 63, and even finds a surprising, though greatly qualified, supporter in Barrett, 71-72. Besides the lack of certainty that there ever was such a myth, nothing in the language or context of this verse even remotely hints at such a mythological understanding. The “rulers” are not demonic powers; and even if they were, the evidence of the Gospels, which reflects the view of the early church, is that the demons were the only ones who did in fact recognize Jesus. Moreover, in this context it is not Jesus about whom the “rulers” are ignorant, but about God’s wisdom, which was displayed in the very crucifixion for which they were responsible.

³⁷Cf. the similar irony in the Peter speech in Acts 3:15, “you killed the author of life”! See also Acts 2:22-25.

who, as Lord of all the ages, is therefore Lord of the final glory that is both his and his people's ultimate destiny. The Pauline irony, of course, is that the Corinthians in pursuing *sophia* are pursuing what belongs to *this* age, which is passing away and whose rulers were implicated in the divine irony.

9 In typical style Paul concludes the argument to this point with scriptural support. In this case, however, there are considerable difficulties with the "citation."³⁸ First, *what* is he citing? and second, *how does it function* in the argument? These questions are made more difficult by the fact that the "citation" occurs in two parts, which as they now stand form an *anacolouthon* in the Greek sentence (grammar that "doesn't follow"). Literally the text reads:

- line 1: "What eye did not see,
- line 2: and ear did not hear,
- line 3: and did not enter into the heart of *man* (= "no human mind conceived"),³⁹
- line 4: "What God prepared for those who love him."

Of the two difficulties, the *function* of the quotation is the more easily resolved. Paul cites two realities, which sustain the two parts of the preceding argument. First, Scripture supports the fact that people in the present age do not understand what God accomplished in Christ: God's ways (his "wisdom") are not even conceivable by the merely human mind. Second, what they are ignorant of is the salvation that God "has prepared for those who love him." Lines 1-3, therefore, support what is said in vv. 6b and 8; line 4 supports v. 7, that God has destined eternal salvation for us. At the same time, line 4 anticipates the next section of the argument, which is picked up immediately in v. 10.

That much seems clear enough. Paul's syntax also indicates that the clause functions to *conclude* the argument to this point.⁴⁰ The introductory

³⁸These difficulties have led to a nearly impossible interpretation at both the popular and scholarly level, to the effect that the content of the passage speaks to what is yet future. Thus, "eye has not yet seen, etc., what God yet has in store for those who love him." But that not only misses what is actually said, but also misses the context rather widely.

³⁹The NIV has correctly captured the sense of the Hebrew idiom, but has unfortunately left out the word ἀνθρώπου, which in this context therefore misses the point altogether. God's wisdom is something that no *human* mind has conceived.

⁴⁰What the syntax does not seem to allow is an interpretation such as one finds in the RSV and NEB, which sees the quotation as the beginning of the next section of the argument (RSV: "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit"). In this view the entire quotation functions as the object of the verb "revealed" in v. 10. But this destroys Paul's syntax altogether by missing the adversative force of the ἀλλά of v. 9 and running roughshod over the explanatory γάρ that begins v. 10.

formula, “however, as it is written,” is identical to Rom. 15:3. As in that passage, the “however” is a strong adversative to the preceding negatives (v. 8), especially the first one.⁴¹ Thus he says, “the rulers of this age did *not* understand, *but* even as it stands written. . . .” This structural observation also helps, despite the *anacolouthon*, to make sense of how the two clauses go together. The NIV disregards the relative pronoun, “what things,” of line 1 and makes the relative clause of line 4 the object of the verbs in lines 1 to 3. More likely the reverse of this is intended, with lines 1 to 3 being the object clause of the anticipated verb “prepared” in line 4 (cf. Moffatt: “*What* no eye has ever seen, etc., God has prepared *all that* for those who love him”). In this case the emphasis lies with line 4, which is precisely the point of the argument that began in v. 6. Paul thus argues: “We speak God’s wisdom, salvation through Christ crucified, which none of the rulers of this age understood; but even as it is written: What no one could see, hear, or understand about God’s ways, these things⁴² God has prepared for those who love him.”⁴³ The next part of the paragraph goes on to explain *how* those who love God understand his “wisdom.”

But *what* is he quoting? First of all, no OT passage resembles this one in its entirety. The closest thing to it is Isa. 64:4 (LXX 64:3), which contains some close verbal similarities to lines 1 and 2.⁴⁴ In that case line 4 might be a free adaptation of “what things you will do for those who wait for mercy.”⁴⁵ The closest parallel to line 3 is to be found in the LXX of Isa. 65:16: “and it shall not enter their hearts.” Because no exact parallel is to be found in the OT, and because the citation appears to be complete in its present form,

⁴¹This ἄλλά has been a major source of difficulty for many. For a helpful discussion of the alternatives, see Frid, “Enigmatic ΑΛΛΑ,” pp. 603-06. The one view that does not seem likely is that it repeats the ἄλλά of v. 7 and that v. 9 should then have an understood λαλοῦμεν as its verb: “But even if it is in mystery, we speak etc.” As Frid rightly notes, this makes meaningless the ἄλλά of v. 9.

⁴²Thus the second ἃ functions very much like a ταῦτα.

⁴³Frid, “Enigmatic ΑΛΛΑ,” p. 610 n. 45, who also recognizes the parallel with Rom. 15:3 and that v. 9 therefore stands in contrast to v. 8a, offers a slightly different solution, which has a similar net result. He sees the sentence as an ellipse and would add the verb from v. 8, “we know.” Thus: “None of them knew, but, as it is written, what things etc., these things we do know.”

⁴⁴LXX:

ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος οὐκ ἠκούσαμεν
οὐδὲ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἡμῶν εἶδον . . .
ἃ ποιήσεις τοῖς ὑπομένουσιν ἔλεον.

“From eternity we have not heard,
nor have our eyes seen. . . ,
what things you shall do for those who wait for mercy.”

⁴⁵The phrase “for those who love God” appears again in Rom. 8:28 (and possibly 1 Cor. 8:3, q.v.), thus suggesting that Paul is comfortable with it. It has a rich OT background (e.g., Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:9, and scores of others), but nowhere does anything like the present clause appear in this form.

several alternative suggestions have been presented: e. g., an unknown apocalyptic writing,⁴⁶ a prior Jewish collation of OT passages, or a prior apocalyptic amalgam of OT ideas.⁴⁷ The fact that the passage appears in this same form in the Ascension of Isaiah suggests most strongly that Paul himself is not freely paraphrasing the OT. Most likely the “citation” is an amalgamation of OT texts that had already been joined and reflected on in apocalyptic Judaism, which Paul knew either directly or indirectly. In any case, the introductory formula, “as it is written,” makes it certain that he considered the citation to be God’s Word,⁴⁸ and therefore the twin points of vv. 6-8 have previously been announced by God and are now seen as having come to pass.

10a If the main point of the citation in v. 9 was to support the argument of vv. 6-8, the final line of the citation, “what God has prepared for those who love him,” prepares the way for the main concern of the entire passage, namely that God’s wisdom can be known only by God’s people because they alone have the Spirit. But there is some difference of opinion, based on a textual difference,⁴⁹ as to how this sentence is syntactically related to what has preceded. If “but” is the correct reading, then the sentence stands (as in the NIV) as an adversative to the whole of v. 9, with special emphasis on the contrast between their inability and “our” ability to grasp God’s wisdom. That is, v. 10 basically stands in contrast to lines 1-3 of v. 9. But on the analogy of Rom. 15:3-4 and on the basis of its excellent support, an explanatory “for” is the preferred reading. In this case, the explanation picks up the emphasis on line 4 in the citation. The others could not understand the things that “God has prepared *for those who love him*, for *to us* God has revealed⁵⁰ [them] by the Spirit.” The contrast, therefore, despite the emphatic position of “to us,”⁵¹ lies not so much between “us” and “them” as on the reason they could not, but we can, understand the

⁴⁶See the evidence mustered by M. Stone and J. Strugnell that the citation is from an otherwise unknown *Apocalypse of Elijah* (*The Books of Elijah, Parts 1-2* [SBLTT 18; Missoula, 1979]).

⁴⁷See Ellis, *Use*, p. 35, for a discussion and bibliography. For more recent work, see A. Feuillet, “L’enigme de I Cor., II,9,” *RB* 70 (1963), 52-74 (Digest in Eng. in *ThDig* 14 [1966], 143-48); and K. Berger, “Zur Diskussion über die Herkunft von I Cor. ii.9,” *NTS* 24 (1977/78), 170-83.

⁴⁸Cf. Ellis, *Use*, pp. 22-25.

⁴⁹See n. 1 above.

⁵⁰Gk. ἀπεκάλυψεν, the verb that became the technical one for the “divine revelation of certain supernatural secrets” (BAGD); see, e. g., Ps. 98:2 (LXX 97:2). This becomes a particularly well-developed idea in Jewish and Christian “apocalyptic,” e. g., Dan. 2:22 (cf. vv. 19 and 28 Theod.). For Paul this is the ordinary verb for supernatural revelation of any kind.

⁵¹The emphatic position of ὑμῖν is not so much to contrast “us” with those who cannot perceive God’s ways, but to place “us” in immediate juxtaposition with “those who love him.” Thus: “For to us, namely those who love him, God has revealed what is otherwise hidden.” On the significance of the first person plural here, see n. 13 above.

things that God has prepared for his people. That is, as vv. 10b-13 make clear, the emphasis lies on the *means* of revelation, the Spirit, not on the recipients themselves, although the latter of course are always in view, an emphasis that will be picked up again in vv. 14-16.

10b-11 With the second sentence of v. 10, Paul begins the main part of his argument. The key to understanding God's wisdom lies with the Spirit.⁵² The basis of the argument that follows is the Greek philosophic principle of "like is known only by like,"⁵³ that is, humans do not on their own possess the quality that would make it possible to know God or God's wisdom. Only "like is known by like"; only God can know God. Therefore, the Spirit of God becomes the link between God and humanity, the "quality" from God himself who makes the knowing possible. This of course is for Paul a fortuitous bit of reasoning, for two reasons: (1) This is what he really believes about our ability to know the ways of God that are otherwise "past finding out"; left to themselves, the natural man/woman cannot know God by reason or intuition, as Paul affirms in v. 14. (2) This is precisely the linkage he needs in his argument with the Corinthians. By their own experience of the Spirit of God, they consider themselves to be "spiritual." Apparently they have thought of spirituality mostly in terms of ecstasy and experience, which has led some of them to deny the physical body, on the one hand, and to a sense of "having arrived" (cf. 4:8), on the other. What Paul is about to do is to present the Spirit as the key to the proper understanding of the gospel itself, especially of his preaching (v. 13) and their own gifts (v. 12); and in this context, as always, the gospel, God's wisdom, is the message of salvation through the crucified one.

The sentence begins with an untranslated "for," which links the

⁵²Although Paul does not so designate him here, the argument of the entire passage confirms that he is referring to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. The ease with which Paul flows in and out of the language "Spirit" and "Holy Spirit" makes this decisive. Cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 1:5 and 1 Cor. 2:4, where in similar contexts Paul in the earlier letter designated him as "Holy Spirit," but not in the latter. In this letter, see 6:11 and 19 and esp. 12:3. On the other hand, one must be careful not to read too much later Christian theology back into Paul's language here. From what is said in this paragraph one may conclude that the Spirit is divine, but it goes beyond Paul's concern to address the question whether the Holy Spirit is a distinct Person. Nonetheless passages like this one, and 12:4-6, serve as the "stuff" out of which the later full Trinitarian formulations are (legitimately) mined. On this question see D. W. Martin, "'Spirit' in the Second Chapter of First Corinthians," *CBQ* 5 (1943), 181-95.

⁵³On this question see esp. Gärtner, "Idea" (see n. 8). Whether the actual "source" of Paul's usage is his own experience or an adaptation from the Corinthians themselves is a moot point. In either case, two things are certain: (1) this is the only occurrence of this principle in the extant Pauline corpus, and (2) as usual he has so thoroughly adapted it to his own theology that the question of source becomes nearly irrelevant.

explanation that follows as a kind of commentary to the first assertion, that God has revealed (his wisdom)⁵⁴ to us through the Spirit. The Spirit is first of all linked with God: “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” Although somewhat unusual language for Paul, it is not inexplicable. Elsewhere he speaks of the “depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom. 11:33), reflecting his sense of the profound greatness of God, which is part of Paul’s Jewishness, both OT and apocalyptic.⁵⁵ The idea of the Spirit’s “searching” all things, even the depths of God, is best understood in light of Paul’s own explanation in v. 11.⁵⁶ Perhaps this sentence, too, has a tinge of irony. They considered Paul’s preaching to be “milk”; on the contrary, he implies, redemption through the cross comes from the profound depths of God’s own wisdom, which his Spirit, given to those who love him, has searched out and revealed to us.

In v. 11, with yet another explanatory “for,”⁵⁷ Paul offers a supporting analogy for the fact that the Spirit knows the things of God, and makes the further point that he *alone* knows them. Here in particular the principle of “like is known by like” is spelled out in detail, in this case influenced by the OT motif that no one has ever seen God. The analogy itself is a simple one, and insists that just as the only person who knows what goes on inside one’s own mind is oneself, so only God knows the things of God.⁵⁸ Paul makes that point by use of the word “spirit” because first of all he is talking about the Holy Spirit and secondly because it is for him a common word for the interior expression of the human person.⁵⁹ Thus, while Paul

⁵⁴There is no object to the verb ἀπεκάλυψεν in Paul’s sentence. Probably, as Godet, 147, observes, that is because the emphasis lies on the *fact* of revelation here, not on what is revealed. The context makes it certain that something very much like “his wisdom” is in view.

⁵⁵See, e.g., a passage like Dan. 2:20-23. Although there is no mention of the Spirit as the agent of revelation, the linguistic parallels with v. 22 (“God reveals deep and hidden things”) are of such a nature that one scarcely needs to search Greek or Gnostic sources for this terminology.

⁵⁶What lies behind such an idea can be illustrated from Rom. 8:27, where God is called the One who searches people’s hearts (an epithet with deep OT roots: e.g., 1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 139:1, 2, 23). In this passage the fact that he searches the hearts of others functions as the presupposition that he must *a fortiori* also know the unspoken desires of his own Spirit. On this see Cranfield, *Romans*, I, 424.

⁵⁷Gk. γάρ. This piling up of γάρ’s is a typical feature of Pauline style. Cf. 1:17, 18, 19, 21; 3:3, 4; 9:15, 16, 17; and many others.

⁵⁸The one difference between the two parts of the sentence has to do with the verb “to know” (οἶδεν/ἔγνωκεν). The older commentators suggested that the differences have to do with the capacity for “knowing” itself (e.g., Lightfoot, 179; R-P, 44); more likely ἔγνωκεν is chosen in the second instance because it constitutes a truer perfect and suggests the sense of “no one has ever known” (cf. Barrett, 74).

⁵⁹The phrase “the man’s spirit within him” is almost identical to the LXX of Zech. 12:1: πνεῦμα ἀνθρώπου ἐν αὐτῷ.

would undoubtedly understand the human “spirit” as a distinguishable constituent of the human personality, this sentence is *not* trying to make a definitive anthropological statement,⁶⁰ nor is it suggesting that the analogy of the Trinity fits the human personality. Moreover, Paul is not trying to make a definitive pneumatological statement. It is analogy, pure and simple. And the analogy does not have to do with the constituents of personality; rather, it has to do with our common experience of personal reality. At the human level, I alone know what I am thinking, and no one else, unless I choose to reveal my thoughts in the form of words. So also only God knows what God is about. God’s Spirit, therefore, who as God knows the mind of God, becomes the link to our knowing him also, because as v. 12 goes on to affirm: “we have received the Spirit of God.”

12 With this sentence and the next we come to the central issue in the entire paragraph.⁶¹ The argument began with the assertion that Paul does indeed speak wisdom among the “grown-ups” of God’s people. That wisdom, which is not esoteric knowledge of deeper truths about God but simply his own plan for saving his people, is contrasted to that of the leaders of the present age, who cannot know God’s wisdom because it is his “secret, hidden” wisdom, destined for, and finally revealed to, those who love him. That revelation has been given by the Spirit, who alone knows the inner secrets of God, and whom, as this verse now affirms, “we have received.” Since “like is known by like,” the Spirit, who alone knows the thoughts of God, becomes the link on the human side for our knowing the thoughts of God.

As in vv. 6-9 Paul makes that point once again by way of antithesis to those of the present age.⁶² He is forever reminding the Corinthians that they belong to a different world order, a different age, and therefore must not do as they are now doing—pursue or think in terms of merely human *sophia*.⁶³

⁶⁰It seems clear in this case that the word πνεῦμα is another expression for νοῦς. Cf. v. 16, where to have the Spirit of God is the same as to have the νοῦν of Christ.

⁶¹The δέ that joins the sentence to what precedes is “consecutive” or “resumptive.” It should be translated “now,” resuming the point of v. 10a, after the mild digression of vv. 10b-11.

⁶²Note again the interchangeability of αἰών ([this] “age”) and κόσμος ([this] “world”). See above on 1:20.

⁶³As throughout the passage the interpretation of the “we” is crucial to one’s understanding of the sense of the whole passage. Those who see this as polemical (in the sense of the Corinthians vis-à-vis Paul) suggest that he is here arguing with them that he, too, has the Spirit and not they alone (e.g., Conzelmann, 66-67). There can be little question, of course, that Paul is included in the “we” of this verse, and in a secondary sense it may reflect this polemic (as vv. 15-16 also probably do); but the language “what God has freely given us” echoes “our glory” in v. 7 and “to us who love him” in vv. 9 and 10 and seems to make most sense as referring especially to the Corinthians.

The usage in vv. 7-10, plus the connection of this verse with v. 10 by means of

In receiving the Spirit,⁶⁴ it was not “the spirit of the world” that “we have received.” Made to walk on all fours, this can be seen as unusual language. But Paul’s point is simple. He is not suggesting that there is a “spirit” of the world comparable to the Holy Spirit, nor is he referring to demonic “spirits.”⁶⁵ He is rather saying something about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit whom we have received is not “of this world”; rather, he is “the Spirit who is from God.”⁶⁶ The implication, of course, is that since they have the Holy Spirit, who is not of this world, they should desist thinking like this world.

The final clause of the sentence picks up the point of vv. 6 and 10 and thereby gives the reason, in *this* context, for our having received the Spirit, namely, “that we may understand⁶⁷ what God has freely given us.” This latter phrase in particular picks up the motif of v. 9, “what God has prepared for those who love him,” and gives us a clear glimpse into the *content* of the wisdom that God has revealed to his people by his Spirit. The verb (*charizomai*) seems to be a deliberate allusion to the “grace” (*charis*) of God, or the “gift” (*charisma*) of salvation (as in Rom. 6:23);⁶⁸ it appears here in the neuter plural (“what things have been freely bestowed”) because it is reflecting the neuter plurals of v. 9. Therefore, this language seems determinative that Paul, in talking about God’s wisdom in this passage, is referring to salvation through the crucified one (as in 1:23-24; 2:2). And God’s people “understand” that precisely because they have received the Spirit.

the resumptive δέ (see n. 61) and the fact that in Paul the language “receive the Spirit” elsewhere refers only to believers in general (see the following note), seems also to deny the force of the assertion by W. C. Kaiser that “Paul is not talking about the Spirit that animates believers, but about the Holy Spirit’s operation in delivering the Scripture to the apostle” (see “A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions: I Corinthians 2:6-16,” *WTJ* 43 [1981], 301-19; the quotation is from p. 315). Kaiser’s concern is indeed picked up in v. 13, although the language “delivering the Scripture to the apostle” seems to be a considerable distance from Paul’s own concern and intent.

⁶⁴This is ordinary NT language for the gift of the Spirit; cf. Acts 2:38; 10:47; 19:2; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2, 14; Rom. 8:15. In Paul it refers primarily to Christian conversion.

⁶⁵This was suggested, e.g., by Ellis, 29-30, on the assumption that it is related to “the rulers of this age” in vv. 6 and 8, whom he incorrectly understands to be demonic powers. Cf. Barrett, 75.

⁶⁶The NIV has thus correctly caught the sense of the contrast in this sentence, but by so translating it is also forced to miss the exact repetition of the designation from v. 11. Thus: “. . . except *the Spirit of God*; and we have . . . received *the Spirit of God*.”

⁶⁷Gk. εἰδῶμεν, picking up the verbs from v. 11.

⁶⁸Conzelmann, 67, candidly acknowledges as much, but is so enamored with Hellenistic parallels in the paragraph that he immediately qualifies it by saying that “χάρις, too, can assume the tenor of the mysteries and denote the power within the pneumatic, thus becoming synonymous with πνεῦμα. It will therefore be necessary to look for further indications.” But why should one do so when both the argument itself and the terminology are so thoroughly Pauline?

13 Having been arguing that their common gift of the Spirit is what enables them to understand God's wisdom, Paul now returns to his own preaching of that wisdom, first mentioned in vv. 6 and 7, and links it to the same reception of the Spirit. This sentence, therefore, not only continues the argument at hand,⁶⁹ but also recalls the preceding paragraph (2:1-5) with its underlying apologetic motif. "What we preached to you was God's wisdom all right," he asserted (vv. 6-7), despite what they may think. Now he returns to that assertion by way of the explanation of vv. 10-12. Just as we have all received the Spirit so as to understand the gift of salvation, so also the message "I"⁷⁰ preach is given "in words taught by the Spirit."⁷¹ The Spirit is thus the key to everything—Paul's preaching (vv. 4-5, 13), their conversion (vv. 4-5, 12), and especially their understanding of the content of his preaching as the true wisdom of God (vv. 6-13). As throughout the paragraph—and the entire argument beginning with 1:17—what he says positively about his own ministry is placed in antithesis to what is merely human: "not in words (*logois*) taught by human *sophia*."⁷² The ties to 2:1-5 are obvious. "Words" of course does not mean simply language itself, but the meaning, or message, contained in the words as they give expression to the gospel.

What is less obvious is the further explanation of this teaching. Did Paul intend "expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (NIV), or "interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual men" (NIV mg.), or "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (KJV, RSV mg.)?⁷³ The problems are two: (1) finding

⁶⁹Gk. ἃ καὶ λαλοῦμεν, lit. "what things *also* we speak." "What things," of course, refers to "what God has freely given us." λαλοῦμεν is a repetition of the verb from vv. 6 and 7, and therefore seems clearly resumptive.

⁷⁰Since λαλοῦμεν repeats the verb of vv. 6 and 7, it is also likely that the "we" here picks up the editorial "we" of those sentences. Hence "I." See n. 13 above.

⁷¹The noun πνεύματος lacks the definite article, thus indicating that the presence or absence of the article with πνεῦμα does not determine whether Paul intends *the* Spirit in any given instance. Otherwise N. Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 17-22. The clue to this usage, both in Paul and in Luke-Acts, is probably related to various constructions with certain cases and has nothing to do with the Spirit's personality. Cf. the usage of the article with personal names in the Gospel of John (G. D. Fee, *NTS* 17 [1970/71], 168-83).

⁷²O-W, 158, suggest the alternative possibility of "learned words of human wisdom," but they make too much of the subtle shades of meaning. Héring, 20, on the unfounded assertion that the common translation would only be possible if διδακτός were a noun, adopts a conjectural omission of λόγοις and thus translates: "amongst people instructed in human philosophy." But such conjectures are unnecessary, especially since the "subjective" or "agency" use of the genitive with this adjective is found also in John 6:45, which Héring overlooks.

⁷³Gk. πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες. The KJV translates "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," giving rise to the use of this text at the popular level to support the analogy of Scripture, i.e., comparing one text with another so as to derive its meaning from within Scripture itself. That is a useful hermeneutical principle, based on

a proper meaning for the verb *synkrinontes*, and (2) determining whether the word *pneumatikois* refers to the just-mentioned “words taught by the Spirit” or means “spiritual people” and anticipates the antitheses of vv. 14-15.⁷⁴ On this second matter the possibility that it anticipates what follows has in its favor the immediate contrast of the “nonspiritual person” in v. 14. In this context that could make a lot of sense. Nonetheless, the grammar would seem to favor the view that Paul is giving further explication of what he has just said.⁷⁵ “We speak words taught by the Spirit,” he asserts, “which means that we [explain] spiritual things [probably referring to the “things freely given us by God,” v. 12] by means of, or with, the spiritual words taught us by the Spirit.”

As to the meaning of the verb, Paul is the only one to use it elsewhere in the NT, in 2 Cor. 10:12 (twice), where it plainly means “compare,” a meaning that does not seem appropriate here. Some have argued that it should carry its classical sense of “combining”;⁷⁶ however, Paul’s septuagintal background seems determinative in favor of “explaining” or “interpreting.” Most likely therefore he intended something like “explaining the things of the Spirit [as described in v. 12] by means of the words taught by the Spirit,” that is, as Holladay (p. 47) suggests, “in language appropriate to the message, not with human wisdom.”

14 In a sense the argument to this point has been consummated with v. 13. Both the “what” (God’s hidden wisdom, salvation through the cross) and the “how” (revelation by means of the Spirit) of God’s wisdom “have been sketched in antithetical language.”⁷⁷ With vv. 14-16 Paul now picks up the negative side of the antithesis, in light of what has been argued positively about the work of the Spirit in vv. 10-13. At the same time he seems to be setting up the Corinthians for the polemic of 3:1-4.

belief in the common inspiration by the Spirit of all Scripture, but it is quite beside Paul’s present point.

⁷⁴It is possible, though less probable, that it is neuter and simply means something like “spiritual means” or “spiritual things” in general.

⁷⁵The participial construction, modifying *λαλοῦμεν*, argues for the closest possible tie to what has already been said, not a loose addition anticipating what follows. Furthermore, one would expect the definite article with *πνευματικοῖς* if “those who are spiritual” were intended.

⁷⁶Most recently Kaiser, “Bibliology,” p. 318, and MacArthur, 63; cf. Lightfoot, 180-81, and Goodspeed (translation). Kaiser does so on the basis of the not totally relevant assertion, borrowed from Godet, that “the meaning of ‘interpreting’ for this verb is foreign in the N.T. and Classical Greek.” Nor is there any NT usage meaning “combine”; and the comparison with classical Greek is particularly irrelevant since the word was regularly used with the meaning of “interpreting” or “explaining” in the LXX (e.g., Gen. 40:8, 16, 22; 41:12, 13, 15; Num. 15:34; Dan. 5:7), but never in the “classical” sense.

⁷⁷This is the language of Funk, “Word,” p. 296.

The thrust of v. 14 is an elaboration of the negative side of vv. 6 and 8-9 (also 12 and 13) in terms of the people of this age who miss out on God's wisdom; only the language is new. Those who belong to this age are now called *psychikoi* (NASB, NAB, "the natural man/woman") in contrast to those with the Spirit, who are called *pneumatikoi* (v. 15; cf. 15:44-46). There has been considerable debate over this term, mostly in terms of its origins and why Paul uses it. Whatever else, the ensuing description demonstrates that it refers to those who do not have the Spirit, and thus to the merely human. But why this usage, since Paul elsewhere prefers some form of *sarx* ("flesh") when making a contrast with *pneuma* ("Spirit"), as he does in the polemical paragraph that immediately follows? Perhaps it is a Corinthian term that he is picking up and turning against them.⁷⁸ But in this case it is difficult to see how they might have been using it, unless they were describing Paul in this manner. More likely it comes out of his own Jewish background, where the Greek noun *psychē* has been used to translate Heb. *nepeš*, which often simply denotes humanity in its natural, physical existence.⁷⁹ This seems to be his present point. With this term he is designating people who are not now, nor have they ever been, believers. They are strictly people who know only the "wisdom of this age" (v. 6). When he turns to address the Corinthians, who are in fact acting just like these people without the Spirit, he calls them *sarkinoi* (3:1), which will have a different nuance altogether.

The *psychikoi* are described in three ways, each in terms of their relationship—or lack thereof—to the Spirit. First, they do "not accept the things that come from *the Spirit of God*." This description stands in conspicuous contrast to the "we [who] have received . . . the Spirit of God" of v. 12. The verb in this case is the ordinary one for "receiving" or "accepting" another person. The implication is not that *psychikos* persons are simply incapable of understanding the things of the Spirit, but that, because of their being "merely human" (i.e., without the help of the Spirit), they "reject" the things of the Spirit.

Second, the reason for this "not accepting/rejecting" is that the things of the Spirit "are foolishness to [them]." Because they have not received the Spirit, in the sense of v. 12, their view of everything is from the bottom up, twisted and distorted. This is another sure indication that Paul is still pursuing the argument of 1:18–2:5, where the preaching of Christ

⁷⁸This is the view of Wilckens, 89-91, who sees it as a Gnostic term being taken over by Paul; cf. Pearson, 38-39; Horsley, "Pneumatikos"; and Davis, 117-25, who see it as evidence of Philonic influences.

⁷⁹See the discussion of these terms in *TDNT* IX, 608-63 (E. Schweizer), and *NIDNTT* III, 676-86 (G. Harder).

crucified, God's wisdom, is rejected as foolishness by those who are perishing (1:18, 23). People are revealed for who they are by their response to the cross; to see it as foolishness means to stand over against God and his ways—and to stand under his judgment as without his Spirit and therefore apart from “what he has freely given us.”

Third, again in antithesis to v. 12, the “natural man/woman *cannot* understand” the very things that the one who has received the Spirit *can*. Here the emphasis lies on their inability. Again it is “like is known by like” (see v. 11); without the Spirit they lack the one essential “quality” necessary for them to know God and his ways—“because they are spiritually discerned.” This last phrase demonstrates the fluidity of Paul's use of language. The word “spiritual” is now an adverb;⁸⁰ but the context makes it clear that Paul intends “by means of the Spirit,” not by some intuitive process. For Paul, “to be spiritual” and “to discern spiritually” simply means to have the Spirit, who so endows and enables.

The verb translated “discern”⁸¹ is a crucial one. The fact that it occurs only in this letter in the Pauline corpus (ten times), and that in every case but one (14:24) it appears in a polemical or ironical context, makes one think that it is probably a Corinthian word that Paul is taking up against them. Finding a proper meaning for it is difficult. Technically it can mean to “examine” in a judicial sense, and it clearly has that meaning in the two instances where he charges them with “judging” him (4:3-4; 9:3).⁸² Here there seems to be a play on the word; many think it is also ironical, anticipating the usage in 4:3-4. Probably it means something very close to “discern” in the sense of being able to make appropriate “judgments” about what God is doing in the world; and the person “without the Spirit” obviously cannot do that. As such it is immediately picked up in v. 15 as the one proper activity of the truly “spiritual” person.

15-16 With these sentences the argument of the present paragraph, as well as that of the whole section that began in 1:17, is brought to its conclusion. At the same time they serve to lead into the strong polemical application of all this to the Corinthians and their quarreling (3:1-4). The four parts seem to form an ABBA pattern:

- A The spiritual person examines all things;
- B But he/she in turn is examined by no one.
- B' For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?
- A' But we have the mind of Christ.

⁸⁰Gk. πνευματικῶς.

⁸¹Gk. ἀνακρίνω; cf. v. 15 (2x); 4:3 (2x), 4; 9:3; 10:25, 27; 14:24.

⁸²The emphasis lies on the process of examining, rather than the verdict itself, implied in the root verb κρίνω.

The first line stands in sharp contrast⁸³ to the final word about the *psychikos* person in v. 14. That person is totally unable to understand the things of the Spirit because such things are “examined” by spiritual means, that is, they are examined, discerned, so as to be understood by means of the Spirit, whom the *psychikos* does not have. But the *pneumatikos*, the “spiritual person” (= the person with the Spirit),⁸⁴ is not at such a disadvantage. This person can “make judgments about all things.” Such a statement of course must not be wrested from its context. It is the Spirit who “searches all things, even the depths of God” (v. 10); therefore the person who has the Spirit can discern God’s ways. Not necessarily all things, of course, but all things that pertain to the work of salvation, matters formerly hidden in God but now revealed through the Spirit.

The second line, which stands in contrast to the first, reverses the order of things in light of what has just been said in v. 14. But here there seems to be a play on the word “discern.” The person lacking the Spirit cannot discern what God is doing; the one with the Spirit is able to do so because of the Spirit; therefore, the one without the Spirit cannot “examine,” or “make judgments” on, the person with the Spirit. In its first instance this simply means that the person who belongs to this age is not in a position to judge as “foolish” the person who belongs to the age to come. As someone has said, “The profane person cannot understand holiness; but the holy person can well understand the depths of evil.” Those whose lives are invaded by the Spirit of God can discern all things, including those without the Spirit; but the inverse is not possible. Here is another sentence that, taken out of its context, has suffered much in the church. There are always some who consider themselves full of the Spirit in such a way as to be beyond discipline or the counsel of others. Such a reading of the text is an unfortunate travesty, since these people are usually among those most needing such discipline.

But one wonders whether with these words the argument does not also move subtly toward the next paragraph, and even more so toward the conclusion to be reached in 4:1-5. The Corinthians regard themselves as “spiritual” and as such they are also “examining” the apostle. Paul allows that the truly “spiritual” person, the one who understands what God has done in Christ crucified, discerns, “examines” all things. Thus he himself will be able to make the necessary judgments about them that follow. Indeed, the whole of this letter will be the spelling out of the principle detailed in line A. But also because he has so understood “the mind of Christ,” he

⁸³Set off in the Greek text by an adversative δέ.

⁸⁴The context seems to demand such a meaning for πνευματικός. To suggest, as does Grudem, 158, that it here means “spiritually mature” seems to miss Paul’s argument.

disallows their making judgments on him. To the contrary, by their actions they have proved themselves to be less than truly “spiritual,” indeed “fleshly,” acting like mere humans who do not have the Spirit. Thus as a “spiritual person” he himself is “not subject to any man’s judgment.” As he will insist in 4:3-4, he is not subject to any merely human court because he belongs to the Lord, who alone will judge him, as well as all others.

The third line (B') gives scriptural support for the assertion of the second (B). But it does so without an introductory formula (e.g., “it is written”). Thus Paul reworks Isa. 40:13⁸⁵ in such a way that in its present form it serves as a rhetorical question, demanding the answer “No one.”⁸⁶ “For,” he asks rhetorically in light of line B, “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” Again, in the context of the argument this probably has a double intent. On the one hand, it simply asks rhetorically of the *psychikoi* how they can expect to know true wisdom, and thereby pass judgment on the one who has the Spirit, when they do not have the mind of the Lord. “Who is the person who wants to match wits with God?” he asks. But surely this, too, is directed now at his Corinthian friends themselves. “Who among his detractors, now enamored with human wisdom and passing judgment on Paul, is so capable of knowing the mind of the Lord that he/she can bypass the very wisdom of God itself as it is revealed in the cross?” Indeed, whoever would pursue wisdom so as to avoid the story of the cross fares no better than the person who would commit the ultimate folly of thinking he or she could instruct the Lord himself.

The final line (A') corresponds to the first assertion in v. 15, but now in direct response to the rhetorical question of v. 16a. “But,” in contrast to those who lack the Spirit and thereby do *not* know the mind of the Lord, “we have the mind of Christ.”⁸⁷ By “mind” he probably means the thoughts of Christ as they are revealed by the Spirit. In fact in the Greek Bible that Paul

⁸⁵He has left out the middle line of three (“who has become his advisor?”), since it would fail to serve his present purpose. According to Robertson (*Grammar*, p. 724), the ὅς that introduces the second line of the quotation “denotes a consecutive idea, ‘so as to.’”

⁸⁶Cf. Wilckens, 95. This line is often interpreted otherwise, namely as support of line A, implying that the question from Isaiah is open-ended at this point, to be answered by the next line. That is, “The spiritual person judges all things, . . . for who has known the mind of Christ? The answer? We have.” But that puts too much stress on the grammar (the δέ of the final line is better understood as an adversative, especially in light of the emphatic “we” and the change to “mind of Christ”), and does not fit the argument as well.

⁸⁷The substitution of “Christ” for the “Lord” of the Isaiah passage probably has no significance for the present argument, but it does indicate something of Paul’s own Christology! For him Christ is Lord; therefore when the OT speaks of the Lord, he sees in such language references to Christ himself. See also in this regard the interchange of the “Spirit of God” and the “Spirit of Christ” in Rom. 8:9.

cites, the word “mind” translates the Heb. *rûah*, which ordinarily means “spirit.”

Thus the argument is brought full circle. Paul began by insisting that his message was in fact an expression of wisdom—God’s own wisdom, revealed as such by the Spirit. He at least—in contrast to the merely *psychikos* person, the mere human being without the Spirit—understands the mind of Christ. As those who possess the Spirit the Corinthians also potentially possess that same mind. However, as he will now point out, their behavior betrays them. They do, but they don’t. The concern from here on will be to force them to acknowledge the folly of their “wisdom,” which is expressing itself in quarrels and thereby destroying the very church for which Christ died.

This paragraph has endured a most unfortunate history of application in the church. Paul’s own point has been almost totally lost in favor of an interpretation nearly 180 degrees the opposite of his intent. Almost every form of spiritual elitism, “deeper life” movement, and “second blessing” doctrine has appealed to this text. To receive the Spirit according to their special expression paves the way for people to know “deeper truths” about God. One special brand of this elitism surfaces among some who have pushed the possibilities of “faith” to the extreme, and regularly make a “special revelation” from the Spirit their final court of appeal. Other “lesser” brothers and sisters are simply living below their full privileges in Christ. Indeed, some advocates of this form of spirituality bid fair to repeat the Corinthian error in its totality. What is painful about so much of this is not simply the improper use of this passage, but that so often it is accompanied by a toning down of the message of the cross. In fact one is hard-pressed to hear the content of “God’s wisdom” ever expounded as the paradigm for truly Christian living.

Paul’s concern needs to be resurrected throughout the church. The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather, it leads to special status vis-à-vis the world. But it should do so always in terms of the centrality of the message of our crucified/risen Savior. The Spirit should identify God’s people in such a way that their values and worldview are radically different from the wisdom of this age. They do know what God is about in Christ; they do live out the life of the future in the present age that is passing away; they are marked by the cross forever. As such they are the people of the Spirit, who stand in bold contrast to those who are merely human and do not understand the scandal of the cross. Being spiritual does not lead to elitism; it leads to a deeper understanding of God’s profound mystery—redemption through a crucified Messiah.