

## Week 2, 1 Corinthians 2

### Hook



**Main Point: Knowing God comes through the work of His Spirit.**

**Current Event:** Jiro Ono knows sushi. A documentary called *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* portrays the life of an 85-year-old sushi chef, Jiro Ono, who has spent more than 70 years perfecting his craft. At the age of 9, Jiro was sent to live and apprentice in a restaurant. When he struck out on his own, the chef dedicated himself to perfection of his craft, working consistent 18-hour days.<sup>1</sup> His years of hard work resulted in his earning an elite status by Michelin (three stars), a long wait-list to get into his restaurant, customers who pay nearly \$400 a meal and fame that led to a popular documentary.

The chef believes in working. “I do the same thing over and over, improving bit by bit. There is always a yearning to achieve more.”<sup>2</sup> Jiro’s philosophy is passed on to his apprentices, young men who are so engrained with their mentor’s value on understanding every aspect of their craft, they are not permitted to cut fish until they practice simply handling them.<sup>3</sup>

That is experience.

***What role does experience play in truly knowing something? Describe a time in your life when you faced a challenge with a significant amount of information but little experience.***

***How does someone “experience” God?***

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-master-sushi-chef/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1772925/quotes>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/perfect-sushi>

***How did/does the Holy Spirit teach you about God?***

## Week 2, 1 Corinthians 2

### Book

**Main Point: Knowing God comes through the work of His Spirit.**

**Text Summary:** Paul discusses the nature of true wisdom. He knows that real wisdom, real knowledge, lasting knowledge, comes from God. It is not the human intellect that Paul engages, for he comes in modesty. Knowledge of God is given by the Spirit, not attained by the accomplishment of man. Paul says Christ is the most important thing about Christians, not what they have gained or what they know.

### 1 Corinthians 2:1–5: [Read]

**Sub-Point:** The wisdom of men is worthless compared to the power and wisdom of God.

What creates a genuine change in someone's life? This is the question that Paul hopes the Corinthians will wrestle with in the first five verses of chapter 2. He begins by admitting that he did not bring the Corinthians the kind of oral presentation they were accustomed to; speakers in Corinth and cities like it would have demonstrated extreme skill in their delivery and persuasive arguments. These orators presented the language with such eloquence that individuals would pay, giving their money to listen to speeches as a form of entertainment.

Paul did not deliver this to the Corinthians. Instead, he preached the Gospel. Not with lofty speech—he was not an impressive speaker. Paul communicated “in weakness and in much fear and much trembling.” Some scholars hold that this phrase comments on Paul's speaking and demeanor, simply that he was genuinely weak, fearful and trembling as he delivered the Gospel. Others hold that Paul used those words to demonstrate his complete reliance on God the Father.<sup>4</sup> Either way, the message is clear: Paul did not present an impressive speech.

Further, Paul strayed from what the Corinthians might have expected from a speaker in the content that he provided. Paul's arguments were not rich in humanly wisdom, lacking rhetoric and complex structure. His message was simple: “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Paul spoke the Gospel with simplicity.

And this is where the author creates his argument: his speech was simple, void of human wisdom *and*, through the power of the Spirit, it completely changed the lives of those who

---

<sup>4</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 509.

heard and responded (recipients of the letter). Paul's simple sermons led those who had a taste for dramatic, complex and impressive arguments to a place of conversion.

Notice how free Paul is from the pressures of achievement and personal notoriety. He's free from the need to perform. He knows the Spirit has everything under control. Paul knows the goal is not to make himself look better so that people will follow him. No, his desire is for people to see past him to the beauty of Christ and to put their hope and faith in Christ, not in Paul.

Look at verse 5. He has come so that people will see God's power, not his own wisdom or intelligence. Scholars point out that these opening verses in chapter 2 point back to verse 17 in chapter 1 to show that Paul didn't come in the typical way of popular culture; rather he came in such way that was countercultural. Paul longs for these Corinthians to trust in God, not in the ways of men. Through the Cross, Paul is able to use God's power as a means of valuing and caring for others, and this was different than popular ideas.<sup>5</sup>

***Why was it so important that Paul's audience know that he came in a manner different from the philosophers, politicians and rhetoricians of his day?***

***What did the difference in delivery do for the message of the Gospel?***

***What does verse 2 show is the most important thing for Paul?***

***What was the foundational difference between Paul's message and the message of the culture?***

***Why practice methods like the 3 Circles or Evangelism Explosion if one is simply to rely on the persuasive work of the Holy Spirit?***

### **1 Corinthians 2:6–16: [Read]**

**Sub-Point:** The Holy Spirit brings true knowledge of who God is.

Paul minimizes the significance of human wisdom but, in the remaining section of chapter 2, he recognizes that there is another kind of wisdom that can be gained. He moves on from this, citing Isaiah 64:4 in verse 9 to show that this special knowledge is unattainable by human senses. You can't see it. You can't hear it. You can't imagine it. It's not for the eyes, ears or heart alone.

---

<sup>5</sup> Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 42.

This delivers a strong blow to the culture of Corinth. Paul is telling them that this knowledge, this wisdom of God, cannot be attained by a simple mental pursuit of man. It can't be thought of or expounded on. Paul shows that humanity is not the end of knowing. Meaning, what humanity is able to perceive is not the scope of reality. There's more. It is arrogance that assumes only what we can sense is all there is.

In contrast to the wisdom familiar to the people of Corinth, **true wisdom has several unique qualities:**

**1. It is wisdom of God (vv. 6–7).** This wisdom is not of the age or the rulers of the age. This isn't a human invention. God is beyond time and history. The problem that this creates is that Paul shows that the human mind is limited by time.<sup>6</sup>

**2. Its nature is secret and hidden (v. 7).** The wisdom comes from God and can only be given by God himself (Matthew 11:25). No amount of learning or mental aptitude can elevate someone to reach this sort of understanding on his own.

**3. It has the message of salvation at its core (v. 9).**

**4. It is imparted by the Holy Spirit (v. 10).** The work of salvation is prepared by God, carried out by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Paul shows that we can't fully know anyone apart from ourselves, let alone God.<sup>8</sup> God is beyond our thoughts. He is beyond our perception. He is beyond our comprehension. He is beyond our imagination.

Paul focuses on the Spirit to say that the Spirit brings us this knowledge. The Spirit gets us in and shows us the heart and mind of God. The Spirit gives us access. It's not by our comprehension and ability. It is solely because of the Spirit's condescension. God sends the Spirit to know us personally and in turn to allow us to know God personally.<sup>9</sup>

Paul closes the chapter by introducing two different kinds of people: the spiritual and the natural. The natural person does not accept the things of God (true wisdom) because he simply cannot; the natural man lacks the Holy Spirit who is necessary to discern spiritual things. This individual relies solely on his own mental faculties and certainly misses the mark in understanding.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>7</sup> David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 510.

<sup>8</sup> Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 48.

The spiritual person, however, lives a different kind of life. The *ESV Study Bible* describes such a person:

*On the other hand a person possessing the Spirit and guided by Him is able to evaluate and apply all things the Spirit reveals (v. 10). The spiritual man can be judged only by God (4:3–5), not by unregenerate people (2:15) or by worldly Christians (3:1–3). To have the mind of Christ is to be obedient to God’s revelation (Phil. 2:5–8), as were the spiritual people in the Corinthian church.<sup>10</sup>*

It will soon be discovered in chapter 3 that Paul does not categorize every believer as a spiritual person.

***What does Paul say is the necessary element to receiving knowledge of God?***

***How does verse 15 separate God into a realm apart from any other? How are we different from God in this regard? How does this show our humanity?***

***Why is the knowledge and wisdom of God foolishness to the natural mind, as Paul says in verse 14?***

***How does someone grow in the wisdom of God?***

---

<sup>10</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 510.

## Week 2, 1 Corinthians 2

### Took



**Main Point: Knowing God comes through the work of His Spirit.**

**Discussion:** Remind the class of Jiro Ono's deep knowledge of sushi and ask the following:

*Who knows you best? How did that individual come to know you deeply?*

*What has God taught you about His nature lately? How did you come to learn it?*

*How has learning about God's nature affected your ability to live life well?*

**Lesson Conclusion:** Pray for the mind of Christ. Pray that the Spirit would bring you wisdom and knowledge from God and that would be your joy. Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 2 that knowledge and wisdom from this world will pass away. It is the Spirit that brings wisdom and knowledge that is eternal. We need what we cannot gain on our own. We need the Spirit to show us what our eyes cannot see, our ears cannot hear, and our hearts cannot imagine. We need to live and think in God's spiritual reality. When we speak, let it not be with weakness and humility, but with confidence in the Spirit's working in our hearts and minds and through our lips. Just as Paul did with those in Corinth, may we present ourselves free from worldly obstacles so that Christ and His Gospel would be made much of.

### Challenge

**Allow God to use you in your weakness to display His power.** This was Paul. He came humbly so that God would be made much of. He didn't come on his own strength. Allow God to use you in the areas where you think you aren't competent and thereby show His strength.

**Trust that God's power is greater than your wisdom.** Believe that God is not restrained by our inabilities. Believe that no matter how intelligent we may be, it will never rival God's might. Trust that He is enough, even when you're not. Refuse to value your own wisdom and skills over the limitless resources of the Father.

**Know God deeper through His Word.** Knowledge of God and who He is comes from Him alone, not moral or intellectual ascension. Lean into this truth and let it drive you to God's Word. Let the Scripture have the final say on who God is and what He is like. The Spirit breathes life and knowledge from God when we read His Word. Know it is through this alone that we come to know Him and have a relationship with Him.

Hook by: Scott Olson

Contributors: Kerby Anderson, Dan Drake, Scott Olson