

*1 Corinthians 2:6***PREFACE**

With only a couple of exceptions, since v18 in the first chapter Paul has been using the term “wisdom” (*sophia*) ironically, sarcastically—primarily referencing the “wisdom” of this world, which in the economy of God is no wisdom at all.

But now in v6 of Chapter Two there is a change in tone, and in the space of just three verses he uses *sophia* five times to speak of an enduring wisdom, a timeless wisdom, a mysterious hidden wisdom that can nonetheless be known—a *true* wisdom. And for the previous five verses of Chapter Two Paul has been detailing what he did *not* do and say when he first came to Corinth, but now, with v6 (we can almost see him taking a breath and standing a bit taller), he begins a thread that will carry through to the end of Chapter Two and beyond, detailing what he *did* do and say when he was among them.

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-9.****PAUL’S USE OF *PNEUMATIKOS***

Once again, before we proceed, we need to establish a baseline understanding for a word Paul employs four times from v13 to the first verse of Chapter Three. We aren’t there yet, but it is not too early to clarify what Paul means, for two reasons:

- the entire passage beginning with v6 is infused with the concept; and
- Paul’s use of the word is at odds with the contemporary world in which we live.

That word is *pneumatikos*, translated “spiritual.” Now, in our culture this word is used and applied in quite broad terms; not just grammatically but in application and perception it is decidedly a small “s” spiritual. In this culture one is “spiritual” if one thinks high thoughts, if one contemplates deep things, if one prays to or worships any god of one’s choosing; if one meditates on just about anything.

Not surprisingly this is not how Paul uses *pneumatikos*. In the *Webster’s Dictionary* at my desk, in the six possible usages of the word spiritual there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. The closest it gets is number 5: “of religion or the church; sacred, devotional, or ecclesiastical; not lay or temporal.” But again, that could apply to the small congregation in the Arizona desert that worships a glowing crystal or the planet Jupiter!

Though the word is not capitalized in our Bibles because of the grammar rule, the apostle *means* it in a capitalized way. When Paul writes in v15 that “he who is spiritual appraises all things,” he is referring to the person who considers himself to be a person of *the* Spirit, a person in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells. Paul *always* uses *pneumatikos* as “an adjective having to do with the person or ministry of the Holy Spirit” (Fee).

**v6****Read v6.**

Right off the bat Paul places his discussion about wisdom realized through the power of the Holy Spirit in an eschatological (i.e., end-times) setting. Those still of “this age” are those without the Spirit; they do not understand the wisdom of God. Those “not of this age” (i.e., of the age to come) are those *with* the Spirit, who *do* understand God’s wisdom.

But there is also another, and perhaps more troubling to Paul, division: that between infants and grown-ups within the body—those who are equipped with the Spirit, but remain child-like in their faith, and so are unable to process the wisdom Paul offers.

*Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature;*

You may note that Paul shifts to first person plural in v6 and following. The reason for this here is probably a combination of the editorial “we,” and including those fellow teachers in his team.

**speak** = *laleo* (lah-leh'-o) = a prolonged form of an otherwise obsolete verb; **to talk, i.e. utter words** : - preach, say, speak (after), talk, tell, utter. Compare <G3004> (lego).

**wisdom** = the familiar *sophia*.

**Note:** Just as there are no perfect churches, there is no perfect translation of the entirety of God’s word. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. That is, depending on any given passage, some will be smack on, some will be just OK, others will leave one scratching one’s head over their choice of English word to translate the Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew. Here and in v7 the ESV leaves us scratching our head. “Yet among the mature we do **impart** wisdom” (also in v7; emphasis added).

The Greek means just to speak or preach—to talk. The English “impart” suggests some sort of mystical *transference*—the very thing from which Paul is trying to pry loose the Corinthians: a Hellenistic wisdom mysticism.

**mature, perfect**<sup>kjv</sup> = *teleioi* (tel'-ay-oy) = from <G5056> (telos); **complete** (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.); neuter (as noun, with <G3588> (ho)) completeness : - of full age, man, perfect.

Many have debated what Paul means by “wisdom” and “mature” here. But there is no reason to pump more into it than is there. Chapter Two as a whole is a remarkable treatise on the wisdom and insight available to those in possession of the Spirit. This is one definition of the “mature”: those equipped, by the Spirit, to process the “wisdom” of the gospel.

At the same time, however, the “mature” (those not of “this age”) can be subdivided into the mature and the infantile—or at least childish, immature. Tomorrow someone may give me a complete garage-full of every imaginable tool for the mechanic. Absolutely complete. With these tools I can perform any repair job on any part of any automobile.

But none of that would make me a mechanic.

Within the body of Christ—those not of this age—there are those who are, we might say, fully vested in the things of God. But there are many—far too many—who are in possession of all the same tools, but remain novices in the trade. They have the tools—the Holy Spirit and God’s word—but they have never learned to use them, or they have just dabbled in their use, never seriously learning the trade. In comparison to the unregenerate world, they belong to the “mature,” but within the body of Christ they remain immature.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us one of the most convicting passages of Scripture.

**Read Hebrews 5:12-14.**

I have been walking with Christ for almost sixty years. Imagine consuming, studying any discipline for *six decades*: mathematics, geology, music, philosophy. In that amount of time one would surely be considered an expert in that discipline, an authority to whom others would flock for knowledge and insight. Yet, after sixty years I am ashamed of what I do *not* know about Christ, how I remain so immature in certain aspects of faith, how I have plumbed still so little of the “depths of God” (v10).

*a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;*

This wisdom (*sophia*) of which Paul speaks, and which he *does* speak, does not emanate from “this age,” nor does it speak to those who are part of it, for they are not equipped by the Spirit to comprehend *this* wisdom. They remain enmeshed in the spirit of this fallen world, which the brother of the Savior describes so well.

**Read James 3:13-18.**

No, Paul speaks that kind of wisdom, a wisdom that comes from above, and is eternal. And now the emphasis is not on *form*, but on *content*. Just what was this content? He doesn’t say here, but he said it earlier; we need not guess.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.**

This wisdom is not just future; it is ancient, and leapfrogs over this age, to lead believers into the next.

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:7.**

**Question: When does our glory come? or, When do we receive it?**

**Answer: In the future, in the resurrection.**

But this wisdom was “predestined before the ages” (i.e., before *any* ages).

By comparison, “the rulers of this age... are passing away.”

To be fair we need now to add the NASB to the ESV regarding their translation of this verse; “passing away” is not the best translation of the Greek.

**pass(ing) away**<sup>nasb,esv</sup>, **coming to nothing**<sup>niv</sup>, **come to nought/nothing**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *katargeo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G691> (argeo); **to be (render) entirely idle (useless)**, literal or figurative : - abolish, cease, cumber, deliver, destroy, do away, become (make) of no (none, without) effect, fail, loose, bring (come) to nought, put away (down), vanish away, make void.

That this age and its rulers will ultimately “pass away” is true, of course. But is that what Paul is saying here? The consensus agrees with the KJVs, as Johann Peter Lange writes, “That is, they are bereft of all authority and consideration in the kingdom of God, in the world to come.” Everything they stood for, everything they proclaimed as wisdom, as right, as better, everything they lived for—all will come to naught.

This is exquisitely portrayed by Isaiah in his Chapter Fourteen—the same chapter in which we have the fall of Satan from heaven—in a another “now—not yet” prophecy.

### **Read Isaiah 14:5-7.**

**Sidebar:** From the earliest days of the church the argument has raged over who Paul refers to here as “rulers of this age.” Many have interpreted this to mean the “princes of the air”—that is, demons (because *archon* can also be translated “princes”). But again, most modern interpreters favor human, societal rulers.

Let me close with something else prophesied by Isaiah.

### **Read Isaiah 40:21-24.**

We need to be reminded of this from time to time. We all know it in our hearts, but the sometimes oppressive “wisdom” of this age can force it back into forgetfulness. We serve a God who is Lord over all. These today who think they are sooo, so smart—are in for a rude awakening.