

First Corinthians

January 19, 2025

Chapter 2

How to Select Your New Pastor

“Instructions for the Spiritual Immature”

Chapter 2 is indeed a poor Chapter break. Paul has not stopped defending his position of the power of God through the preaching of Christ Crucified. We now come to Paul's message about Paul's concern for the Corinth Church.

2. Paul's Message (2:1-23)

a) Just Jesus and Him Crucified (2:1-2)

Paul's message is to be just Jesus and Him Crucified. Not fancy or eloquent. Just the message facts. In chapter 1, verse 1, Paul remembers his first visit to Corinth. He says,

¹ And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Paul has already spent much time in Chapter 1 providing his principles for why he makes these statements in verses 1 and 2. He did not have the superior speech and wisdom that Apollos had. But one thing he did have, and that was the testimony of God. He had been a young Pharisee during Jesus' last year at least, and he knew all the facts firsthand of the LORD's crucifixion from the Sanhedrin's point of view. In reality, it did not matter whose point of view he was telling in the story of Christ's crucifixion; all the stories ended with a risen Savior if the storyteller was honest with the story's ending. Paul does not have to know or preach anything else in Corinth. The story is well-known across the Roman Empire. What is the testimony of God in Paul's mind and mouth? We cannot help but scratch a few of his topics, which he will include in his letter to the Romans, including Jesus's incarnation, teachings, miracles, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. Paul had much in his arsenal to use when he visited the synagogues to reason with the lost Jews so that some would come to know the crucified Christ. Many did. For Paul to know nothing, he truly knew a lot. But what he knew, he knew, because it was all just in the Spirit of the power of God.

b) Just in the Spirit of the Power of God (2:3-5)

Paul writes in verse 3.

³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

As stated in the first line of the Preface, Corinth has been destroyed and deserted for many years. When rebuilt, the freedmen of Roman, Greek, and Jewish heritage raised the city from its rubble. These freedmen were not wimps by any imagination. They were freedmen! They were freed from the games in the Colosseum in Rome. They had won their freedom by fighting. They were not awarded freedom because of their niceness; they were awarded their freedom because of their fierceness. Corinth was a rough town. Paul was not a rough man. He had had an education

in the Law of God. He had an easy job sitting in meetings all day, judging others, and making important decisions, such as adding a few more days to a Sabbath day's journey when the LORD told everyone to rest in their homes every Sabbath and not to travel. As a Pharisee in the Sanhedrin, Paul was, in effect, a loophole finder to get around the Old Testament Law of the LORD. The most challenging work Paul ever did was most likely making tents for a few weeks while waiting for a donation to arrive from Macedonia so he did not have to work – work. But now, evangelism work is his job instead. With all that said, Paul knew that the Holy Spirit blessed or rejected everything he did in the ministry. He is the human tool used by the Holy Spirit to draw people to a relationship with the LORD.

Paul's ministry was great because he allowed the LORD to be in charge and let the Holy Spirit work through him as he spoke to all the people he met. Being in the ministry for fifty years, a trustee of a Church looking for a new pastor reached out to me. He asked me, "Dr. Jim, what would be the qualifications of a man wanting to be your pastor?" That would have been an impossible question to answer fifty years before. But now, after fifty years, I did not hesitate one second as I listed the six qualifications I would look for in a new pastor to sit under or minister alongside. That word spread, and reports told me they would look for a pastor with those qualifications. The LORD led them to the man they thought would be the next pastor. I wish I could say it was smooth sailing from there and all would be well, but it was not. The week before the new pastor was to come to preach, given a call to the Church, my phone rang off the wall. The question was the same for everyone. "How will we know if this new pastor is God's Will for the Church?" I could not answer that question fifty years ago, but now I could.

I said, "You will know for sure that he is God's man to be the pastor of your Church if people are saved during his "view of a call message." Honestly, it is rare for people to come to the LORD when pastors are auditioning for a pastorate. Oh! But the LORD spoke plainly. Not only did one come to accept the LORD that morning, but five people accepted the LORD. Glory! It was two weeks before I listened to the message. Frankly, it wasn't a home run. It wasn't especially good. Well, let's say it. It was a bad message. But now, listen to this, and you will understand how the Holy Spirit works.

In 1990, James Robinson was supposed to attend my Church for a half-week revival. It was to start on Sunday night. A big storm came through Texas, and flights were canceled all across Central and North Texas. Hoping that James would arrive, we waited. When he did not arrive, our Senior Pastor took to the pulpit. He apologized to the overflow crowd and somehow ended up telling a story about his wife fixing him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for supper right after they were married. Never in his life did he like P.B.& J. sandwiches. He didn't know how to tell her. She had worked so hard on it. It was beautiful on the plate with the chips and all. The more the congregation laughed, the longer and more detailed the story became. It was a GREAT story. But then, all of a sudden, the preacher looked at the clock, and he was out of time. He said something like, "Folks, I am so sorry. I have wasted our time together without a word from the LORD. Let's just do this. Let's open the altar for you to come and pray for your needs. Our ministers will be here to pray with you. If you want to accept the LORD as your Savior, speak with one of our ministers." We were honestly not ready for what happened next. The altar was filled with hundreds of people, and I remember that night in 1990, more than 75 were saved. You see, it doesn't matter so much what a pastor says in a message. Whether it is a good sermon or a lousy sermon does not matter. What matters is what the Holy Spirit is saying to the listening

people. He is the teacher. He is the true preacher. And He is the one who delivered the offer to come to the altar or accept the LORD into the hearts of the hurting people that night. Week after week, for 53 years, sermon after sermon, good or bad, over 53,000 people became members of that Church. More than 20,000 were through salvation and baptism. Sometimes, the preacher would knock the message out of the park, and only a few would come to the LORD. Sometimes, the preacher could not pitch the metaphorical message ball over the plate, but dozens would come to the LORD.

Rarely was there a week when no one came to the LORD. I have been fortunate to serve in Churches where people were coming to the Lord almost every week. The only exception seemed to be on big family holidays and weekend pageant programs when it was rare for someone to accept the LORD. In some Churches, if we baptized ten a year, it was considered a bountiful year. It all has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit and the connection between the Holy Spirit and the preacher in the pulpit. I have known many genuinely anointed by the LORD. Some men the LORD has chosen to be pastors, shepherding the flock in the struggles of daily life. I have known many truly anointed pastors in the last five decades—some men the LORD has selected as Bible teachers. I have been fortunate to have known many of the best. Those offices have been working in the Church since the death of John, the last Apostle and prophet. Apostles and prophets are no more.

John was the last of those two lines. Evangelists should be the lead pastors in the pulpits every week. Pastors serving under the delegated authority of that Evangelist [lead Pastor] should be on staff to biblically meet the struggles and spiritual needs of the Church families to help fulfill the Spirit-inspired duties of the lead pastor. Teachers, working under the delegated authority of the Evangelist [lead pastor], should be teaching and training the teaching of the LORD found in the Holy Bible. As such, Evangelists [lead Pastors] are on the front end of the Great Commission. Teachers are on the back end of the Great Commission. Lower-level pastors baptize, direct, and meet the congregation's needs.

All that Paul said, and the examples herein, are to show that Paul was right when he said that salvation comes *“in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”*

All of this involved the lost sinner coming to the LORD. But Paul also talks about God's eternal provision, which involves wisdom.

c) Just the Eternal Provisions of God (2:6-9)

When Paul speaks of just the eternal provisions of God, he is talking to the spiritually mature saints.

“6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’”

Here, Paul explains that God, in His eternal wisdom, has held some things back and has not revealed everything He has prepared for us. Indeed, we can understand this when we think about the Book of Revelation. When Paul writes this letter in 57 AD, it will be 39 years before the LORD reveals to John what He has prepared and will reveal in the Book of Revelation. All that is in the

Book of Revelation is prophecy. A prophecy is a promise. As a promise, God has “*predestined*” it to all to come to pass. He has promised it will come to pass. It was all known before the ages of the creation of the Earth occurred. When Paul wrote these words, he did not know the mysteries of things to come, which would be revealed to the Apostle John. Neither did John know them until they were shown to him by the LORD. These *predestined* promises are not all of the LORD’s making. He is not speaking them into being. Instead, He is telling us what mankind and the rest of His creation will do in the future so that we can put our faith in Him and trust Him because He has told us the future, and when the future occurs, it proves that He alone is the only all-knowing God.

Here is my point. If the wisdom and knowledge of all that the LORD foreknew that would occur on earth had been revealed while Jesus was still on earth, the rulers would not have crucified Him. If they did not crucify Him, they, that is, mankind, would have thwarted the LORD’s plan to be the crucified Christ, the final sacrifice for the sinful individuals and His offer to be their LORD and Savior. Therefore, that part of the plan, and the end times part, was hidden, thus a mystery until the proper time for all to be brought into the light and revealed in the rest of God’s Word. It all has to do with the crucified Christ, even the Revelation passages, and all that has to do with the Gospel of Christ Jesus and His appearing at His Second Coming.

As Paul says, “*just as it is written*,” he follows with a quote. We come to a quandary here. Only the first part of Paul’s quote seems to come from the Old Testament.

“*For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him*” (Isaiah 64:4).

The line “*All that God has prepared for those who love Him*” is not found in the Scriptures. Instead, Paul took bits and pieces from different passages to construct the idea in the sentence. Gill’s Expository Commentary explains as follows.

“The things which God hath prepared for them that love him;” in the original text is, “*for him that waiteth for him*”; the sense is the same, for such as hope in the Lord and wait for him, are lovers of him; and the meaning is, that God has prepared and laid up in his own breast, in his counsels and covenant, in the types, shadows, and sacrifices of the old law, in the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, such doctrines and mysteries of grace as were not so seen, heard, known, and understood by the Old Testament prophets and saints; and has reserved for his people under the Gospel dispensation, the times of the Messiah, a more clear discovery of them: so the Jews themselves own that these words belong to the world to come, which with them commonly signifies the days of the Messiah; though here they think fit to distinguish them, and interpret the phrase, “*eye hath not seen*”, of the eye of the prophets: their words are these; “*all prophesied not, but of the days of the Messiah; but as to the world to come, eye hath not seen, O God, besides thee.*” The gloss on it is, “the eye of the prophets hath not been able to see it.” Indeed, the mysteries of the Gospel are more clearly discerned now than by the prophets formerly.

We are most thankful for Gill’s Commentary and insight. It falls in line with the other classic commentaries of the faith. We are a long way down the timeline from Paul. We can look back at the whole council of God found in the complete Bible; while alive, Paul can not. We know what God has prepared for us. Paul is not so lucky. When he is writing this letter in 57 AD, all Paul has

that is considered Scripture is, in timeline order, the complete Old Testament, the Book of James written about ten years before, Paul's two letters to the Church in Thessalonica, and the Gospel of Mark. That is all. And it is all just the Revelation of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

d) Just in the Revelation of God (2:10)

As just in the Revelation of God, the deliverer of the mysteries is the Holy Spirit. Paul continues in verse 10.

¹⁰ For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Yet, remember, Paul is an Apostle with miracle-working powers. He is also a prophet who can foretell the future as the Holy Spirit reveals things to him, even some considered the depths of God, as Paul says in verse 10. By this time, Paul has only written two letters, both to Thessalonica. In those letters, under the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, Paul has foretold the snatching away of the saints in the future, foretold the resurrection of the saints who have died, added information to the events of the Day of the LORD [Armageddon], announced the coming of the man of lawlessness, and the coming of the great apostasy. Some of John's Revelations would be much harder to understand without these details. Even Peter, to whom the Holy Spirit did not reveal these revelations, wrote about Paul,

"Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:14 – 16).

The Holy Spirit knows all the mysteries. The Church is learning the mysteries little by little. Paul knows a portion of the mysteries. But what does man know?

(1) What Does Man Know? (2:11)

Paul answers that question. Verse 11.

¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

A lost man knows what he is thinking. That same man does not know what another man is thinking. Neither does he know the thoughts of God. But the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God because He is God. But this verse is for the lost man. What about the saved man? What have the saints received from the Holy Spirit?

(2) What Have Saints Received? (2:12-13)

Paul has that answer, too. We have received the Holy Spirit! Verse 12.

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

In 57 AD, the Holy Spirit has two tasks on His to-do list. One is short-term, and one is long-term—first, the short-term duty. Of course, the Holy Spirit is not on man's timeline. Nevertheless, we know His timeline. Over the next 39 years, the Holy Spirit must reveal to Matthew, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and the anonymous writer of the book of Hebrews the content of their books to complete the New Testament. His Scripture reveals that it will only be to those six men. Then, that task will be done.

Second, as for the rest of the saints, the Holy Spirit's long-term work will not be complete until all the saints of the LORD are transformed into sinless bodies to live with the LORD in all His Glory forever and ever. When a person accepts the LORD as Savior, they become a saint. As a saint, the Holy Spirit enters that person to dwell inside that person until they are transformed. What an incredible honor! As a saint, one-third of the Godhead lives inside you. Living inside you, the Holy Spirit constantly teaches, convicts, and guides you. He teaches you when you should not do something because it is wrong. You do not know why it is wrong, but He does. You just know it is wrong. Then, you must decide to follow His guidance or defy His guidance. He always allows you to make that choice. He never forces you.

In addition, He trains you as you read the Scriptures. As you mature in the Scripture, you will gather more insight into the nuggets of gold, silver, and precious stones found in the Scripture. However, be warned, the Holy Spirit will never teach you something or reveal something to you that He has not shown to one of the writers of the Scripture and had it written on paper with ink. The Scripture is completed once John completes the last book of the New Testament. Nothing new has ever been added to the Scripture since John wrote Revelation, Chapter 22, verse 21. At that time, all prophecies of foretelling the future ceased with John's death in 98 AD. In addition, there will never be men like Jesus and the twelve Apostles who can do healing miracles and raise the dead by touch or command.

With that as the case, what has man received?

(3) What Has Man Received? (2:14)

Again, Paul answers this question.

¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

In other words, the natural man, devoid of God in all but two ways, neither receives, accepts, or understands anything about the mysteries of God. I mentioned two ways the natural man receives the mysteries of God. First, he receives the mystery of God concerning his life and breath while here on earth. That is a mystery to all natural men and spiritual saints alike. Second, without his knowledge, the natural man has received the instinct from birth that the Creator God is real. To this, when Paul arrives in Corinth in a few months and writes to the Romans to tell them they are without excuse when it comes to knowing God because God puts that knowledge in every human at birth.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened"

(Romans 1:18 – 21).

Paul said the natural man "cannot understand them," that is, the mysteries of God, "because they are spiritually appraised." What does that mean? To understand them, you must have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to help you and teach you how to discern them. The Holy Spirit does this illumination through His sanctifying work in you as a saint of the LORD.

With that, we come to another question. What do saints have?

(4) What Do the Saints Have? (2:14-16)

Because saints have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, they have a special ability to do something under the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit—verse 15.

¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

As saints indwelled by the Holy Spirit, we can discern all spiritual things. But here is the strange thing about this passage: no natural man can determine how we have insight into the Gospel because they lack spiritual discernment. It is a mystery to the lost natural man how saints can discern spiritual mysteries under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 16 comes from Isaiah 40:13. To understand who Paul is talking about, we should read the context of verses 13 and 14.

“Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult, and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?” (Isaiah 40:13-14).

Verse 16 says, “*For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?*” From Isaiah 40:13-14, we are told that this verse references the Holy Spirit. He knows the mind of the LORD; He will do the instructing. When the LORD Jesus took on human flesh as a babe, He was guided by the Holy Spirit, Who watched over Him, consulted Him, taught Him, informed Him, and gave Him understanding as a child.

With that thought in mind, Paul completes the verse, “*But we have the mind of Christ.*” How do saints have the mind of Christ? We have the mind of Christ because the same Counselor, Guide, and Teacher of Christ, while He was on earth, lives inside every saint. He counsels, guides, and teaches all saints the very thoughts of the mind of Christ. Halleluiah!

However, Paul is still working on this topic because the men in Corinth are not mature. They are still spiritual babies, and all they can eat is the food of babies.