

CORINTHIANS – THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 3

In weakness, in fear ... in the Spirit

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:2,3

Study 3a: The Power of the Gospel (2:1-5)

2:1 Was Paul an impressive preacher? (2 Cor.11:3-6)

[v.1] ... arriving at a city like Corinth, where he knew that philosophical and literary curiosity reigned, the apostle had said to himself that, to prevent the Divine work from being corrupted in its essence, preaching must from the first have the simplest character and address itself solely to the conscience. Origen, and in our day Neander, have thought that this resolution was the consequence of the failure which Paul had experienced at Athens when using a more philosophical procedure in his preaching ... his discourse at Athens was not preaching strictly so called. He had first of all to explain himself in reference to the accusation raised against him, and only after that could he come to the proclamation of salvation; this is what he was about to do at the moment when he was interrupted. [Godet 125]

2:2-5 In what, if not Paul's personal magnetism, did power reside? (Acts 18:4,5,8)

What God has done in Christ crucified is a direct contradiction of human ideas of wisdom and power, yet it achieved what human wisdom and power fail to achieve. [Barrett 56]

The apostle declared that in making known the gospel he sought to use all simplicity of speech, but when it came to opening up the truth of God to believers, there are deep things, wonderfully precious things, that cannot be given to the world at large, which form the hidden wisdom of God ... God has His deep things which are not for the world outside, but for those who have already received the gospel message. The Lord Jesus Himself warned His disciples against casting pearls

before swine. What did He mean by that? Simply this, the unsaved man, the man who has never been regenerated, has no more ability to appreciate, to enter into and enjoy spiritual unfoldings than the swine has ability to set a value on beautiful pearls, and therefore, the message for the unsaved is the gospel ... [Ironsides 91-92]

[v.3] The account given in Acts makes it clear that Paul had had much to discourage him just before he came to Corinth ... He must have been rather downhearted, and this was reflected in his general manner. In any case the Corinthians were not very impressed by his personal presence as we see from 2 Cor. x.10. So Paul tells us that he had been without strength, and afraid, even to the point of trembling (Phillips [translation], 'I was feeling far from strong, I was nervous and rather shaky'). At the same time his fear was primarily of God rather than of men. It was fear in the light of the task committed to him ... [Morris 52]

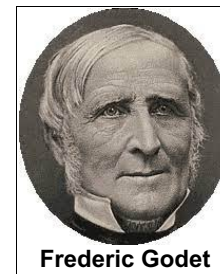
3b: Truth too Precious to Trust to Angels (2:6-11)

2:6-8 The decisive proof that the world -- without revelation -- cannot know God

[v.6] ... some of the Corinthian Christians, especially perhaps after hearing Apollos and other visitors, were inclined to dismiss Paul's teaching as elementary, ABC stuff. He assures them that he has more advanced teaching to impart to those who are spiritually **mature** (*teleoi*, a word used in mystery religions of the 'initiated'), but evidently he does not regard the Corinthians as sufficiently mature to assimilate this wisdom (cf. 3.1-3). [Bruce 37-38]

[v.8] There is an intentional antithesis between the term *crucified*, which indicates the lowest degree of humiliation and suffering, and the title *Lord of Glory*. [Godet 141]

[v.8] More than one scholar has thought that this [Lord of glory] is the loftiest title Paul ever applies to Christ ... It fitly stands alongside the application to Christ of a scripture originally referring to Jehovah in i.31. [Morris 56]



Frederic Godet

2:9-11 Why is Christian revelation superior not only to reason, but even to supernatural revelation (Heb.2:1-4)

Paul does not say (as no doubt many in Corinth, as elsewhere, would have said) that these treasures are prepared for those who know God, but for those who love God (compare viii.3). Not *gnosis* but love is the touchstone of Christian maturity and spirituality. [Barrett 73]

[v.10] ... in later Gnosticism **depths** connoted recondite knowledge; here it refers to the revelation of the divine essence and purpose. Paul may have in mind Job 11.7, 'Can you find out the deep things of God?' ... [Bruce 39]

[v.11] To make intelligible to his readers this inward activity of the Divine Spirit, the apostle invites them to contemplate the working of man's spirit in man himself. For man is made in the image of God, and that precisely in virtue of his spiritual nature. There is in every man a life hidden from all eyes, a world of impressions, anxieties, aspirations, and struggles, of which he alone, in so far as he is a spirit, that is to say, a conscious and personal being, gives account to himself. This inner world is unknown to others, except in so far as he reveals it to them by speech. Such is the

likeness of what passes in the phenomenon of revelation between God and man.
[Godet 149-50]

[v.11] Nobody can really know what is going on inside a man, nobody except the man's own spirit. From outside other men can but guess. But the spirit of the man does not guess. He knows. In the same way, reasons Paul, no one outside God can know what takes place within God. Nobody can know but the Spirit of God Himself. That is to say, the Spirit knows God from the inside. There can be no question but that this passage ascribes full deity to the Spirit. And it also implies that the revelation of which Paul has been speaking is authentic. Because the Spirit who reveals is truly God, what He reveals is the truth of God. [Morris 58]

"This passage ascribes
full deity to the Spirit"

Leon Morris

3c: ... & too Precious to be Trusted to Humans (2:12-16)

2:12-13 What makes the Christian revelation inherently trustworthy? (Prov.30:1-6)

[v.12] ... the wisdom which the Spirit imparts can be acquired only by diligent study, with humble and receptive minds; and the Corinthian Christians gave little evidence of progress in this study. [Bruce pp.39,40]

2:14-16 Though these passages contain some of the clearest ascriptions of Deity to both Christ and the Spirit, why should we resist the temptation to use them with cultists?

When you remember that the soul is the seat of man's emotional nature, you will realize that the natural man is a creature led not by conscience, not by an enlightened spirit, but following the desires of his own heart as a soulish man because he follows his own affections and desires. He is a creature of emotions, and that is why it is so easy to say that every sin appeals in some way to the emotions of the natural heart ... the psychical man is a selfish being, he is a self-centred person, for after all, the soul is the self. The natural man, therefore, is the man who lives the self-life ... [Ironside 108-9]

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The Paradoxes of Paul -- and the Gospel



C.K. Barrett

Of all the epistles, those to the Corinthians are most full of Christian paradox -- of strength that is made perfect in weakness, of poor men who make many rich, of married men who are as if they had no wives, of those who have nothing but possess all things, who are the scum of the earth but lead it to salvation, who die and yet live; and the heart of the paradox is the preaching of the feeble and stupid message of the crucified Christ, which nevertheless proves to have a power and wisdom no human eloquence possesses, since it is the power and wisdom of God himself. [Barrett 64]