



## CHAPTER 10

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# A Tale of Two Worlds: An Analysis of 1 Corinthians 2

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The Apostle Paul's first biblical letter to Corinth is a gift for contemporary leaders. The nuanced historical, geographical, theological, political, and sociological landscape mirrors the plurality and diversity present in the Western world and presents guidance for those who will take heed (Thiselton, 2000). Captivated by a ministerial charge from the resurrected, glorified Jesus (Acts 9:15–16), Paul embarked on his second missionary journey traveling around the Mediterranean to metropolitan areas such as Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus (Acts 15:36–18:22). Driven by the mandate of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's guidance (Acts 16:6–10), Paul faithfully proclaimed the gospel of Jesus with a strategic approach, ministering in growing metropolitan regions so diverse populations, in conjunction with tourists and merchants, could

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hear the gospel. This approach enabled the message to be carried around the known world.

Paul was a religious scholar, accomplished writer, tentmaker, itinerant preacher, missionary, mentor, and apostolic leader (Acts 18:3; Phil 3:4–6). He was instrumental in transforming the religious landscape of the first-century world and has much to offer us in the twenty-first century. Before a thorough exegetical analysis of 1 Corinthians 2, it is essential to explore the city of Corinth, the church of Corinth, and the circumstance of Corinth.

## THE CITY OF CORINTH

Corinth's geographical, political, and sociological norms are inextricably connected to Paul's message to the Corinthian church. Before its Roman control, Corinth was a thriving Greek city eclipsing the influence and prominence of Athens (Blomberg, 1994). Rome strategically attacked Corinth in 146 BC as they ascended to geopolitical dominance (Blomberg, 1994). By 44 BC, Julius Caesar determined its value and rebuilt Corinth, with its population quickly rising to nearly 80,000 people (Blomberg, 1994).

By Paul's time, Corinth was an epicenter of commerce, athletic competition, and religious exploration (Pathrapankal, 2006). Its "strategic position" on the Isthmus created somewhat of a land bridge and simplified exchange between Asia and Europe (Thiselton, 2000, p. 1). Sailors could drag their boats across the Isthmus, measuring four-and-one-half miles and narrower in various places (Verbrugge, 2008), rather than sailing "a considerable extra distance around the dangerous coastline of southern Greece" (Blomberg, 1994, p. 18). Corinth became unrivaled in its abundance of goods and manufacturing, being featured throughout Roman cities for its "pottery, lamps, roof tiles, and sculpture[s]" (Johnson, 2004, pp. 15–16).

Corinth's ascent in wealth among its neighboring Greco-Roman cities not only derived from manufacturing and trade but its recreational opportunities. Take, for example, the Isthmian games, only second in prestige to the Olympian games (Blomberg, 1994). Travelers came on a "biennial basis" to enjoy the festivities of the Isthmian games (Pathrapankal, 2006, p. 69). Additionally, Corinth provided a theater-style venue seating 18,000 people, with an additional concert area holding 3000 people for various forms of entertainment (Blomberg, 1994).

Various sociological and political factors contributed to Corinth's cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic demography. The edict of Claudius, promulgating the expulsion of Jews from Rome because of their connection to Jesus, increased Jewish Corinthian inhabitants (Thiselton, 2000). Partnered with the increasing Jewish population, numerous Greco-Romans found Corinth a desirable home due to its economic success, athletic competitions, religious plurality, and connectedness to Rome. As a Roman city and colony, Corinthian citizens had the right to vote and establish "elected city officials annually" (Johnson, 2004, p. 15). Furthermore, Corinthian citizens could own property and initiate adjudication for wrongdoing (Johnson, 2004). Corinth's ethnic plurality led to religious plurality where Corinthians could worship gods within the vast Greek mythological ether in numerous temples (Pathrapankal, 2006). Johnson (2004) describes the plethora of Greek gods at length:

Archeological and literary evidence shows that Corinth had temples or sanctuaries devoted to the gods Aphrodite (two varieties), Isis and Serapis, Artemis, Dionysus, Poseidon, Apollo, Helius, Pelagrina, Necessity, Fates, Demeter, Maid, Zeus, Asklepius, Hermes, Athena, and Hera Bunaea. (p. 17)

Additionally, Roman Corinth demonstrated its fidelity to the Roman imperial cult by expanding emperor worship while relocated Jews, and the established Jewish community, continued their allegiance to Judaism and Jesus, respectively (Pathrapankal, 2006). Religious plurality defined Corinth.

## THE CHURCH OF CORINTH

Corinth's cosmopolitan diversity and opulence may have appealed to the pagan world, but for those with a Judeo-Christian worldview, the city was "marked by the worship of idols, sexual immorality, and greed" (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 3). For the most part, Corinth's opulence was not experienced by the majority of Corinthian Christians. They found themselves in the lower socioeconomic societal echelon (Verbrugge, 2008). Corinthian Christians were not, however, monolithic. First Corinthians indicate wealthy individuals were part of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11:17–22) as well as house servants (1 Cor 7:20–24). Aquila and Priscilla were manual laborers (1 Cor 1:16), while

Crispus and Stephanus held households (1 Cor 16:15; Thielman, 2005). Unfortunately, class diversity created the opportunity for sinful classism, which seeped into the Christian community (1 Cor 11:17–22; Verbrugge, 2008).

The spirituality of Corinth provided openness to the message of Jesus. However, its religious pluralism struggled with the exclusive claim of Christianity. Many Corinthian converts came from pluralistic, idolatrous religious pasts (Verbrugge, 2008). Because of this, the Apostle Paul recommended particular parameters to keep the Corinthians from shaming the gospel, reverting to idolatrous living, and creating stumbling blocks for fellow believers (1 Cor 8–10).

The moral laxity present within Corinth was known throughout Rome “so much so that a verb had developed in the Greek language that transliterates as ‘to korinthianize,’ meaning, ‘to live an immoral lifestyle’” (Verbrugge, 2008, p. 244). This moral laxity bled into the Christian community. The Corinthian church was riddled with ethical issues, particularly sexual sin (1 Cor 5; 6:12–18). They were engulfed with racial, sexual, and judicial problems. Not only that, but they also weaponized their spiritual gifts to demonstrate their superiority (1 Cor 12–14). All issues considered, Engels (1990) provides a compelling case for the centrality of the Corinthian church regardless of its prevailing problems: “Corinth was a logical place to establish a strong Christian church, for its numerous trade connections would assure the rapid propagation of the new religion, and quite soon it came to dominate the other churches of the province” (p. 20).

## THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF CORINTH

The archeological finding of “the Delphic letter of Claudius” relating to Lucius Junius Gallio’s Corinthian proconsulship enabled biblical scholars to chronologically locate First Corinthians between 54 and 55 A.D. (Thiselton, 2000, p. 32). During Paul’s second missionary journey, he laid the apostolic foundation for the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1:2) and subsequently invested eighteen months building upon that foundation (Acts 18:1–18; Ciampa & Rosner, 2010). On his third missionary journey several years later, Paul sent First Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8) mentioning a previous non-canonical letter that had not produced the desired results within the Corinthian ekklesia (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010).

Ciampa and Rosner (2010) contend that reports of sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry were the primary reasons for Paul's correspondence. These reports stemmed from valid oral reports "from Chloe's people ([1 Cor] 1:11) and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus ([1 Cor] 16:17)," and written reports "from the church that Paul mentions in 7:1 consisting of a series of questions posed by the congregation" that demanded an apostolic response (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, pp. 3–4). The categories of sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1–13; 6:12–20; 7:1–40), greed (1 Cor 6:1–11), and idolatry (1 Cor 8–10) have significant textual data to substantiate Ciampa and Rosner's (2010) claim. While similar to Ciampa and Rosner's (2010) proposal, Thielman (2005) provides broader categories that better address the letter's content. Thielman (2005) presents three critical reasons for Paul's canonical letter: "[1] peace within the church, [2] holiness in the world, and [3] fidelity to the gospel" (p. 278).

### *Peace Within the Church*

The most substantial contributions to this subject are found within 1 Corinthians 1:11–4:21 and 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 (Thielman, 2005; Witherington III, 1995), where Paul addressed the divisiveness of the world's knowledge and wisdom versus God's wisdom and love (Thielman, 2005). However, there are supplemental dealings with peace regarding unity in corporate worship practices such as head-coverings (1 Cor 11:2–16), the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17–34), and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1–14:40) (Thielman, 2005; Witherington III, 1995).

### *Holiness in the World*

The Apostle Paul firmly believed that unity was not mutually exclusive from holiness (Thielman, 2005). In fact, holiness created parameters that established Christian unity amid pagan immorality. Paul was deeply troubled by the Corinthians' sexual promiscuity and immorality (1 Cor 5:1–13; 6:12–20; Thielman, 2005). Such sexual sin within the Corinthian Christian community soiled the gospel of Christ to nonbelieving Corinthians. Additionally, affluent Corinthian Christians were still relying on Roman litigation to settle civil disputes among believers (1 Cor 6:1–11; Thielman, 2005). Such public adjudication made affluent Corinthian Christians look petty and contradicted the message they

believed. Idolatry was another area of struggle for the Corinthian Christian community (1 Cor 10:1–22). With many struggling to leave their idolatrous practices behind, they shamed the centrality and exclusivity of the gospel amid their pluralistic society (Witherington III, 1995). Finally, Paul instructed them to carefully guard their partnerships in marriage and business (1 Cor 7:12–16). Paul believed that intermingling belief and unbelief set Corinthian Christians up for disaster.

### *Fidelity to the Gospel*

The Apostle Paul viewed bodily resurrection as a doctrine of supreme importance (Thielman, 2005). Although Greco-Roman culture offered a variety of views concerning the separation of body and soul at death, nevertheless, Paul viewed future, bodily resurrection from the dead as inextricably linked to the bodily resurrection of Christ and the promise of life forever (Thielman, 2005; Witherington III, 1995). If the dead are not resurrected, Paul explained to the Corinthians that their labor was in vain, and their faith was dead (1 Cor 15:13–19, 58). Thus, Paul penned an occasional “problem-oriented letter” directed at bringing the Corinthian Christian community into unity through God’s wisdom and love, holiness through sexual purity and public congruence, and fidelity to the gospel message through a commitment to supreme doctrines such as the resurrection from the dead (Witherington III, 1995, p. 73).

## EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 2 AND THE CORRESPONDING LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

To understand the textual tones present within the pericope, one must consider the broader context where the text is located. The outline below provides the text’s location (Blomberg, 1994; Verbrugge, 2008). Response to Reports from Chloe’s People Regarding Corinthian Church Division (1:10–4:21).

1. The Issue: Factions and Division in the Corinthian Church (1:10–17)
2. The Cross: Its Centrality and God’s Wisdom (1:18–2:5)
3. Wisdom: Derived from the Spirit (2:6–13)
4. Reception: Spiritual Versus Natural Persons (2:14–16)

## 5. Spiritual Immaturity: A Corinthian Case Study (3:1–4)

Corinthian divisions could not be mended by persuasive rhetoric. Paul's attempt at rhetorical finagling yielded little fruit in Athens (Acts 17:32–34); therefore, Paul abandoned his Athenian approach to rely entirely upon the wisdom and power of God through the message of the crucified Christ (1 Cor 1:18–2:5; Pathrapankal, 2006). The following analysis provides insight into the details of his approach while also considering their application for Christian leaders today.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1–5

Robbins (1996) invites biblical exegetes to explore the text's inner texture concerning narrational progression, repetition, and contrast to better interpret the pericope. Through narrational progression, one can detect Paul's shift from the intellectualism of his Athenian approach. The Apostle's intellectual inadequacies, the Corinthian reception of the message, and the centrality of the Triune God's power exhibit clear narrational progression. Paul's abandonment of human wisdom in favor of the gospel's innate power occurs amid this progression as Paul contrasted lofty speech (1 Cor 2:1) with the Spirit's demonstration and power (1 Cor 2:4–5). In five short verses, Paul mentioned gospel proclamation five times through terms like "proclaiming" (v. 1), "testimony" (v. 1), "speech" (vv. 1, 4), and "message" (v. 4). Oke (1955) lauds "the manner in which [Paul] consistently introduced the gospel at Corinth (2:1–3), not humanly and self-confidently, but in an effacement of himself that allowed the Spirit to indicate His presence and power effectively" (pp. 85–86). Paul's philosophical shift was driven not only by the reproach he faced in Athens but by the Corinthians' adoption of prideful triumphalism based upon the resurrection that needed balancing with the message of the slaughtered Savior (Cousar, 1990). He, therefore, focused on the power of God at work through the gospel message of the crucified Christ rather than the competitive approach rhetoricians employed as they contended for their audience's approval and applause (Bullmore, 1995).

Paul did not attempt to create followers based on rhetorical skill because "he could not surpass or even equal the Greek world in its own kind of eloquence and wisdom" (Barrett, 1968, p. 64). Human wisdom, however, is incompatible with God's wisdom as God does not think as humans do (Pathrapankal, 2006; Isa 55:8–9). If God did,

His Christ would not have been crucified (1 Cor 1:21–24). Humans may outmaneuver one another linguistically, but God’s power cannot be outmaneuvered (1 Cor 2:4–5). Therefore, Paul trembled and came humbly before the Corinthians deserting the arrogant rhetorical style of the Sophists (Witherington III, 1995). Paul spoke in such a way that success depended entirely upon God’s power (Verbrugge, 2008). Paul wanted the Corinthians to experience the crucified Christ, not himself (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010).

### *Paul’s Intertextual Plea*

In addition to inner texture exploration, Robbins (1996) invites exegetes to consider the inter-texture of biblical texts to understand the New Testament’s contextualization of Old Testament texts. The themes of human dependency and divine strength found in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 echo the prophet Zechariah’s famous prophetic declaration, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech 4:6; Williams, 2001, p. 156). As impossibilities to rebuild the post-exilic Israelite community mounted, God sent a message through the prophet Zechariah to Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governmental leader, to trust God’s power to accomplish the impossible. Similarly, Paul trusted God for the impossibility of astute Corinthian listeners receiving the salvific work of a slaughtered Savior through the gracious work of the Spirit from the lips of a sub-par orator. Paul’s humble approach relied on the power stemming from the humility of the crucified Christ (cf. Phil 2:1–5). The Bible teaches that humility and human weakness are fertile ground for God’s work: “Moses claimed lack of eloquence (Exod. 4:10), Isaiah had unclean lips (Isa. 6:5), and Jeremiah did ‘not know how to speak,’ for he was ‘only a youth’ (Jer. 1:6)” (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 117). With this reality in mind, Ciampa and Rosner (2010) view the contrast of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 as complete:

(1) not with (human) wisdom, but with (God’s) foolishness, (2) not with (the world’s) power, but with (Paul’s and God’s) weakness, (3) not to the things that are, but to the things that are not, and (4) not with a demonstration of rhetorical skill, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power. Zechariah 4:6, which Paul echoes in 2:1–5, serves as a fitting summary of this final paragraph of the section: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” (p. 119)

*Leadership Principle from 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 (Biblical Humility)*

Triumphalism and charisma are not leadership traits left in first-century Palestine. They are prevalent in today's leadership discussion and frequently celebrated more than humility. In fact, some scholars join the first-century Sophists and scoff at humility's role in leadership, perceiving humility as a weakness (Exline & Geyer, 2004). With the rise of social media, leaders are often associated with charisma, strength, and fame. Historical leadership icons, however, are those who focused on others rather than themselves (Morris et al., 2005). Take, for example, Mother Teresa. She was consumed with a longing to fulfill Jesus' thirst by serving others (Kolodiejchuk & Teresa, 2007). Mother Teresa pleaded, "Don't look for big things, just do small things with great love....The smaller the thing, the greater must be our love" (Kolodiejchuk & Teresa, 2007, p. 34). This level of humility eludes many today. Yet even business professionals understand that within large corporate organizations, humility is a distinguishing factor that takes businesses from "good" to "great" (Collins, 2001). Morris et al. (2005) defines humility "as a personal orientation founded on a willingness to see the self accurately and a propensity to put oneself in perspective...involv[ing] neither self-abasement nor overly positive self-regard" (p. 1331). Morris et al. (2005) rely upon three categories to describe humility in leadership: (1) self-awareness, (2) openness, and (3) transcendence. We will explore the contribution of these three areas in the broader framework of humility as the exegetical findings of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 provide feedback and critique.

*Self-Awareness*

Self-awareness is aptly described as one's ability to know and understand their strengths and weaknesses (Morris et al., 2005). Perhaps that is what makes humility the slipperiest of virtues. Once one believes they have humility, it vanishes. The ability to understand oneself moves one closer toward humility; however, it does not form humility. Biblical humility occurs when one understands themselves in light of God. Because of the grandeur of the cross and the beauty of Christ, one can understand their identity and subsequent responsibility (1 Cor 2:2, 5). From this view, biblical humility takes the posture of cruciform living—a life utterly dependent upon the suffering of Christ and His life lived through

the leader. When one understands themselves through this lens, they are postured to experience biblical humility in leadership.

### *Openness*

Humility invites one to see their imperfection and desperate need for others, enabling them to call for help (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1992). Openness to others' input breaks the chain of hierarchical, austere leadership and fosters a collaborative, interdependent approach (Lawrence, 2017). Humility finds its expression through collaboration. Inviting others into the process demonstrates a leader's willingness to accept others' strengths and insights. This is precisely what Paul did. After a poor reception at the Athenian Areopagus, Paul determined to rely entirely on God's power rather than his own perceived oratorical abilities. Paul's determination to know nothing except the crucified Christ exemplifies openness to changing methodology and God's direction (1 Cor 2:2). Christian leaders are open to the voice of God and the input of others.

### *Transcendence*

Humility is predicated upon the leader's ability to come to terms with the esoteric reality of transcendence, or one's ability to accept "something greater than the self" (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1331). Christian leaders understand God and His eternal purposes are "greater than the self" (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1331). Therefore, Christian leaders place their leadership in the context of God's eternal purposes and plans. When God's vast, eternal, and unknowable depths are juxtaposed with a leader's enterprises, they invoke humility. Paul's ability to lay rhetorical nuances aside exemplifies his grasp of transcendence. He did not assume he could outmaneuver the rhetoricians of first-century Corinth. Paul relied upon the transcendent God and His transcendent gospel. Paul's understanding of the transcendent crafted a humility that helped him become less egocentric and more theocentric (Warren, 2002).

Principle One: Biblical leaders connect with the humility of the crucified Christ to know themselves, trust others, and see the bigger picture.

## I CORINTHIANS 2:6–9

Contrasts drive this section of Paul’s address as he shifted from first-person singular to first-person plural instruction to include his fellow workers “in Corinth who instruct the congregation” (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, pp. 121–122; Orr & Walther, 1976). Unlike the world’s wisdom (1 Cor 2:1), Paul argued on behalf of God’s hidden wisdom imparted to the mature and kept from the rulers of this age (1 Cor 2:6). To better understand the contrasts in this passage, we will explore “the mature” versus “the rulers of this age” and “secret and hidden wisdom” versus “wisdom of this age” alongside Paul’s reconfiguration of Isaiah’s prophetic passages (Grindheim, 2002; Robbins, 1996).

### *“Mature” vs. “Rulers of This Age”*

Verbrugge (2008) believes “the mature” refers to all believers. Contextually, this conclusion undercuts the broader distinction throughout 1 Corinthians between the spiritually mature and immature (1 Cor 3:2). For this reason, Ciampa and Rosner (2010) view “the mature” as those who “digest and appropriate...the full scope of God’s teaching on salvation and the Christian life” (pp. 122–123). This interpretation remains true to the linguistic understanding of “τέλειος,” being mature or fully developed (Rodrigues, 2014). Thus, the mature can receive intensified revelatory teaching beyond the basic Christian kerygma (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010).

While “the mature” refers to spiritually developed Christians, the “rulers of this age” are ambiguous. The nomenclature pulls heavily upon the ideological backdrop of Paul’s Judaistic theology, where earthly rulers and actions often correlate with demonic, spiritual beings (Caird, 2003; Dan 10:13). Paul’s Jewish training informed his eschatological understanding between the various ages and the actors within these ages:

The present age is characterized by sin and evil and is controlled by “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit that is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:2). The coming age, by contrast, is the age of the Kingdom of God, when all God’s enemies, including death, are destroyed at the return of Christ and God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:24–28). (Verbrugge, 2008, p. 276)

Paul accepted the role of supernatural rulers in concert with human leadership and wickedness.

*“Secret and Hidden Wisdom” vs. “Wisdom of This Age”*

Paul’s secret and hidden wisdom was not like the pervasive religious Gnostic cult and its focus on secret knowledge. The wisdom Paul referenced was secret because it “[had] only been disclosed at the turning of the ages, in the recent historical event of Christ crucified” (Barrett, 1968, p. 71). Only God had this information and systematically disclosed it at the appropriate moment in salvation history (Witherington III, 1995). God’s wisdom was also different from the societal cult of debate and intellectualism present within Greco-Roman culture. Paul employed the term, wisdom, seventeen times in 1 Corinthians, with sixteen of these usages coming in 1 Corinthians 1–3 to reframe their cultural understanding for a theological one (Thiselton, 2000). If the wise ones among the Corinthians convert and the demonic influences surrounding them perceived God’s wisdom, they would have never sought the crucifixion of Christ (1 Cor 2:8; Verbrugge, 2008). For in his crucifixion, they secured their eternal defeat. Only mature believers can fully receive and apply this wisdom God dispenses (Witherington III, 1995).

*An Old Testament Recontextualization*

Paul relied on the Old Testament to affirm his line of argumentation regarding the hidden wisdom of God in contrast to the wisdom of the age. When looking in the Old Testament for the exact citation of 1 Cor 2:9, one will not find it. This begs the question, where is this written? Scholars generally agree Paul loosely quoted from Isaiah 64:4 or “a series of texts that had already been linked together in Hellenistic Judaism” (Verbrugge, 2008, p. 278). Isaiah 64:4 seems likely as it describes the unknowable acts of God from times past. This recontextualization of ancient acts pairs well with Paul’s description of God’s hidden wisdom from times past recently revealed through the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Without locating the text precisely, Paul skillfully recontextualized Isaiah’s prophetic description of God’s hidden activity (Robbins, 1996).

***Leadership Principle from 1 Corinthians 2:6–9 (Individualized Approach)***

Leaders often attempt to provide equal treatment to their followers to dispel notions of favoritism. Great leaders do not treat everyone equally. They connect with their followers uniquely. Elmore (2006) claims this is the difference between leadership checkers and chess. Leaders who treat everyone equally are playing organizational checkers, while leaders tending to followers' individual needs are playing chess (Elmore, 2006). Afsar et al. (2014) posit that an individualized approach encourages "greater creativity and innovativeness" (p. 1273). When Paul addressed the believers at Corinth, he did not offer the same content to every individual. To the spiritually mature, Paul imparted the hidden wisdom of God's plans and purposes revealed in Christ (1 Cor 2:6) while keeping the kerygmatic gospel proclamation simple for those who were immature or unreached (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010). For the sake of ease and continuity, leaders repeatedly attempt a one-size-fits-all approach. Paul's example invites leaders to adopt an individualized approach that will serve people well in increasingly globalized, diverse environments (Jung et al., 2009).

Principle Two: Biblical leaders tailor their approach to individuals and their unique needs

***Leadership Principle from 1 Corinthians 2:6–9 (Competency)***

When recounting Paul's narrative on the road to Damascus, readers regularly consider the Acts timeline without examining the larger biblical context. Therefore, it is communicated that Paul wanted to kill Christians one day, and the next day he made Christian disciples. A quick look at the biblical map dispels such notions as Paul spent three years upon his conversion in the desert of Arabia growing and developing in discipleship (Gal 1:17–18). Paul had an exceptional Jewish pedigree that placed him as a superior among his colleagues (Phil 3:4–7). Yet, he continued preparing to maximize the calling the resurrected, glorified Jesus put on his life. Paul's skillful recontextualization of Old Testament prophetic texts demonstrates a level of mastery and fluency of exegetical application for his listeners. He was competent in his craft.

For contemporary Christian leaders, social media has created a context of sensationalism that bypasses preparation. People are immediately thrust into the spotlight. Perhaps the plethora of leadership failures is connected to character flaws connected to a lack of true competency. As Paul demonstrated, intellectual competency is critical for a leader's credibility. It is not enough to inspire. Leaders must understand the nuances of the enterprise they function within (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003). A leader's knowledge directly correlates to their follower's success (Podgórska & Pichlak, 2019).

Principle Three: Biblical leaders develop competencies prior to carrying out their future calling.

### I CORINTHIANS 2:10–13

After referencing God's Spirit only once to this point (1 Cor 2:4), Paul offered Corinth an in-depth pneumatological discourse referencing the Spirit five times in four verses (1 Cor 2:10–13). God's Spirit is the agent who searches (1 Cor 2:10), reveals (1 Cor 2:10), and teaches (1 Cor 2:13) God's previously hidden mysteries. Paul's discourse relies on "Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g., 1 Enoch 63:3; 2 Baruch 14:8–9; Testament of Job 37:6; 1QS xi 18–19)" to connect God's endless revelatory depths and undercuts the Sophistic pride of human wisdom to create a sense of wonder at God's gracious revelation (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 129; 1 Cor 2:10). The world's wisdom, communicated through gifted rhetoricians, cannot be compared to the Spirit's depths of revelation (Verbrugge, 2008).

Shrouded in divine mystery and hidden wisdom, it seems that Paul echoed Daniel's understanding of God's secrets "where secrets are revealed to the prophet (Dan 2:19–23), not by virtue of his superior wisdom (Dan 2:30), but because the Holy Spirit is in him (Dan 4:6)" (Grindheim, 2002, p. 697). This intertextual echo creates theological cohesion with God's Spirit being the revealer of divine mysteries. Such theological conclusions directly challenge the Corinthian factions regarding class, spiritual status, and preferred teachers (Grindheim, 2002). Only the Spirit can reveal God's mysteries that are "freely given" (1 Cor 2:12). Therefore, Paul and his apostolic comrades take what is taught to them by the Spirit and interpret them to the spiritually mature (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010; Van der Merwe, 2018; 1 Cor 2:13).

### *Anthropomorphic Analogy*

To describe a phenomenological, spiritual experience, Paul employed “the logic of minor to major” comparing a person’s inner thoughts with God’s thoughts and concluding “only God’s Spirit is privy to the profound plan of salvation which has been revealed to the apostles” (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 130). Thus, the Holy Spirit is viewed as an essential member of the Triune Godhead, disclosing divine mysteries otherwise concealed (Blomberg, 1994). Verbrugge (2008) concludes this created a particular pathway of communication for God’s wisdom. As humans communicate their inward thoughts by speaking with one another, so God reveals His thoughts by His Spirit speaking within believers (Blomberg, 1994; Eph 1:14). Thus, “God is known through God alone” (Barth, CD, sect. 27, 179). Paul urged the Corinthians to abandon their dependence upon rhetorical finagling and trust the Spirit of God they had received for the wisdom they desired (1 Cor 2:12).

### *Leadership Principle from 1 Corinthians 2:10–13 (Dependency)*

Copious amounts of leadership data address follower dependency without addressing leader dependency (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013; Krell et al., 2013). If followers are depending upon the leader, who is the leader depending upon? Paul’s dependency upon the Holy Spirit addresses this gap in the leadership literature (1 Cor 2:10–13). Paul argued that “the rulers of this age” are incapable of receiving or understanding spiritual revelation because of their depraved and closed mind to the Spirit (1 Cor 2:11–12). Therefore, spiritual insight and revelation require total dependency upon the Triune God. Dependence is an expression of the leadership principle of humility mentioned earlier. However, its application is nuanced. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) claim that the goal of Christian leadership is to move people onto God’s agenda. Leaders can only discover God’s agenda through spiritual insight (1 Cor 2:10–13). Therefore, they must be totally dependent upon God’s Spirit to understand the necessary path forward. Without spiritual guidance, Christian leaders cannot move others in the right direction. Perhaps that is why Jesus began His famed Sermon on the Mount like this: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). Dependence upon God is the gateway for leaders to direct, develop, and disciple their followers.

Principle Four: Biblical leaders depend on God's Spirit to guide their path and subsequently guide others.

***Leadership Principle from 1 Corinthians 2:10–13 (Communication)***

Our world is facing a communication crisis. Social media has negatively imprinted upon in-person communication skills, leaving our world talking at each other rather than talking to each other (York, 2017). Increasingly, leaders struggle to find the words to say and how to say them. The lack of communicative creativity and empathy is alarming. Effective communication, however, does not rest entirely upon sophisticated rhetorical techniques. Paul made that abundantly clear in dealing with the Corinthians' fascination with eloquent speech (1 Cor 2:1). Paul did not attempt to compete with the rhetoricians of his day. Instead, he charted a different communicative path. He described esoteric, spiritual realities regarding divine revelation through a simple metaphor (1 Cor 2:11). In essence, Paul communicated that the same way the Corinthians had inner thoughts and conversations, God does too, and He reveals those thoughts by His Spirit (1 Cor 2:10). Paul's willingness to create an on-ramp for complex pneumatological concepts illustrates the difference between Christian and Sophistic communication. Biblical leaders are willing to sacrifice flashiness for clarity. They are willing to place profound truth in laymen's terms so that their followers can understand and apply truth.

Furthermore, biblical leaders keep communication clear and cogent. Had the Apostle Paul launched into a lengthy aside regarding divine thoughts and their impartation to humanity, the Corinthian community may have missed the point. Perhaps that is why contemporary communication texts herald the importance of simplicity and clarity when communicating with others (Stanley & Jones, 2006). Biblical leaders leverage clarity and simplicity to tell stories, share examples, and illustrate their point for the sake of authentic, lasting change (Denning, 2007).

Principle Five: Biblical leaders communicate truth creatively and clearly so that their followers can be transformed.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14–16

Paul's juxtaposition of spiritual and natural crescendos in 1 Corinthians 2:14–16 as Paul subtly addressed their factions and defended his apostolic ministry. The Corinthians had judged Paul's apostolic ministry based on natural measures, and Paul reinforced the inappropriate application of human wisdom and procedure for spiritual teaching and ministry (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010). Furthermore, the Corinthians compared their leaders to one another and pitted the factions against each other (Van der Merwe, 2018). Paul warned against such factions noting that spiritual persons, i.e., “those who have accepted the message of the cross and thus have received the Spirit of God,” are able to accurately judge the deep things of God revealed by the spirit and the teachers who communicate the revelation (1 Cor 2:10; Verbrugge, 2008, p. 280). This does not license spiritual people to be subject matter experts on everything; however, they can discern all matters of life according to the Spirit and therefore serve the communities they reside within (Thiselton, 2000). Put simply, those who do not have a relationship with Christ do not have God's Spirit and cannot offer “a comprehensive understanding of God's acts in human history” (Verbrugge, 2008, p. 280). God's revelatory insight through the Spirit should not, however, create elitism, but humility as these truths can only be grasped by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14).

### *A Recontextualization of Isaiah 40:13*

Paul concluded his line of argumentation from the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah: “Who has known the mind of the Lord” (Isa 40:13). With a large constituency of Gentile believers, Paul did not shy away from Scripture's authority to validate his argument (Witherington III, 1995). He boldly employed its truth amid Corinthian factions and debates. Isaiah's prophetic question, “Who has known the mind of the Lord” (Isa 40:13), recontextualized to the Corinthian audience had the expected answer, “no one” (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 137). In its original prophetic context, Isaiah's question regarded God's plan to deliver His people from the nations and their exile. Paul recontextualized this prophetic question to the Corinthians to affirm that no one knows the plans and purposes of God except the Spirit who reveals them to His people (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010). Therefore, only through Christ's mode of thinking, i.e., “God's profound wisdom regarding salvation through

a crucified Messiah which was hidden but is now revealed by the Holy Spirit," can one discern the unknowable mind of God (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 138; Thiselton, 2000).

*Leadership Principle from 1 Corinthians 2:14–16 (Truth-Telling)*

Amid the diversity of Corinth's political, economic, religious, and racial diversity, Paul did not back down from the truth. He told the inconvenient truth that Corinth's pagan philosophy and dependence upon intellectual rhetoric was natural and disconnected from God (1 Cor 2:14). Regardless of their view of Scripture, he rooted his definitive argument in its authority and truthfulness (1 Cor 2:16). Today's Christian leaders often shy away from difficult truths in the name of caring for those they lead. Nothing could be further from the truth. Biblical leaders care too much to leave people in their natural state of thinking. Biblical leaders seek solutions with grace and truth (Jn 1:14) to remedy their followers' misaligned thoughts and actions. Scandal and deception among political, religious, and business leaders have created a renewed thirst for truth-telling (Hackett & Wang, 2012). People are searching for truth as distrust of mass media continues to rise (Brenan, 2020). Paul's message to Corinth urges leaders to embrace truth and share truth no matter how inconvenient or confrontational it may be.

Principle Six: Biblical leaders care enough to tell the truth.

## SUMMARY

The plurality of Corinth mirrors our context today. After attempting to connect intellectually with the Athenians, Paul laid aside the garb of rhetoric to pick up the power of the crucified Christ. His iconoclastic approach challenged the presuppositions and prejudices of his audience; nonetheless, he continued onward. In an environment filled with divisiveness, sexual sin, and arrogant intellectualism, Paul offered contrasting correctives: arrogance exchanged for humility (1 Cor 2:1–5), triumphalism exchanged for cruciformity (1 Cor 2:2), immaturity exchanged for spiritual maturity (1 Cor 2:6–7), natural wisdom exchanged for divine wisdom (1 Cor 2:9–11), and natural living exchanged for spiritual living (1 Cor 2:14–16). Paul's plea to the Corinthians calls out to us. Paul invites biblical leadership in exchange

for the fascination of quick-fix leadership. He invites us to adopt the following leadership principles:

Principle One: Biblical leaders connect with the humility of the crucified Christ to know themselves, trust others, and see the bigger picture.

Principle Two: Biblical leaders tailor their approach to individuals and their unique needs.

Principle Three: Biblical leaders develop competencies prior to carrying out their future calling.

Principle Four: Biblical leaders depend on God's Spirit to guide their path and subsequently guide others.

Principle Five: Biblical leaders communicate truth creatively and clearly so that their followers can be transformed.

Principle Six: Biblical leaders care enough to tell the truth.

These principles derived from Paul's connection to the Spirit and his commitment to Christ enabled him to carry the gospel to the known world successfully. Only God knows what will happen if we adopt and apply these leadership principles (1 Cor 2:9–10). The Spirit is ready to teach us these truths and strengthen our resolve to apply them.

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