

# CHRIST AS GOD'S WISDOM IN A MYSTERY— THE DEPTHS OF GOD

BY RON KANGAS

In the New Testament there is only one category of teaching that has its source in God and is recognized by God—the apostles' teaching. The thousands of new believers in Christ who were produced on the day of Pentecost through Peter's proclamation of the gospel concerning the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ were added to the church, where they "continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles" (Acts 2:42). As "believers were...being added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (5:14), "every day,...and from house to house" the apostles "did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ" (v. 42). In this way the church in Jerusalem (8:1) was grounded and established in the divine revelation conveyed through the apostles' teaching. Later, Paul, "a called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1), engaged in this unique teaching wherever he went. He taught the same things "everywhere in every church," and he trained Timothy, his beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind the believers in Corinth of his (Paul's) ways and teaching (4:17). In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, written in Ephesus, Paul conveys many profound truths; he especially emphasizes the all-inclusive Christ, the church of God in Corinth as a local expression of the universal, organic Body of Christ, and the function of the Spirit in the lives of the children of God and in the meetings of the church of God. In 2:10 Paul says something truly amazing. Referring to "things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (v. 9), he expresses something marvelous: "To us God has revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." In order to be enlightened regarding Paul's word about the depths of God and what can be called the epistemology of the Spirit realized through the Spirit's searching these deep things and making them known to the believers in their regenerated human spirit, we need to learn from the book of Acts how Paul, as Saul of Tarsus, was gained by the Lord and appointed by Him to be a minister and a witness of the resurrected and ascended Christ and of the things in which he saw Him (26:16).

## The Heavenly Vision and the Divine Commission

The life and ministry of the apostle Paul were governed by a heavenly vision—the vision of the resurrected and ascended Christ in His glory—and his teaching and preaching were directed by the Lord's speaking to him directly and indirectly through a member of the Body (v. 19). After Paul saw a great light flashing out of heaven beyond the brightness of the sun, fell to the ground, and heard the Lord's speaking (vv. 13-14), he asked two questions. In response to the first question—"Who are You, Lord?"—He said, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you persecute" (22:8). In response to the second question—"What shall I do, Lord?"—Jesus replied, "Rise up and go into Damascus, and there it will be told to you concerning all the things which have been appointed to you to do" (v. 10).

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In His initial direct speaking to Paul, the Lord Jesus revealed certain crucial matters. In Acts 9:4 He asked him, “Why are you persecuting Me?” Although Paul was persecuting believers, “breathing threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (v. 1), the Lord did not ask him why he was persecuting His disciples; rather, He said, “Why are you persecuting Me?” The word *Me* in verse 4 is of vital spiritual significance, for this word *Me* denotes not only the personal Christ, the Lord of all and the Head of the Body, but also a corporate person—the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), Christ the Head with the church as the Body (Eph. 1:22-23).

In Acts 26:16 the ascended, enthroned Christ disclosed to Paul the reason for His appearing to him: “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you.” Paul was appointed to be a minister of the new covenant, that is, a minister “not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6). This enabled him to be a minister of the gospel (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23) and of the church, the Body of Christ (v. 25). As a minister, Paul participated in the unique ministry of the new covenant, which is carried out first by the apostles and eventually by all the perfected members of the Body of Christ (Acts 1:17, 25; Eph. 4:12). All the apostles carried out the same ministry because the new testament ministry is a corporate ministry in the principle of the Body of Christ. As a minister in this unique ministry, Paul became part of the corporate Me. He was appointed also to be a witness, one who testified of what he had seen, heard, experienced, and enjoyed. Being such a testimony is a matter not of work but of the kind of person we are.

In Acts 26:16 Paul was appointed to be a witness according to Acts 1:8, where the Lord Jesus declared that the apostles would be witnesses “unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Literally, the Greek word translated “witnesses” is “martyrs,” those who “bear a living testimony of the resurrected and ascended Christ” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 8, note 3). Paul was appointed to be a minister and a witness both of the things in which he had seen Christ Jesus and of the things in which He would appear to him. Paul saw not only the Lord Himself but also many spiritual things concerning Christ as portrayed and prophesied in the Old Testament. Paul would experience the three “openings” recorded in Luke 24: the opening of the eyes (v. 31), the opening of the Scriptures (v. 32), and the opening of the mind to understand the Scriptures (v. 45). Divine light would shine upon many things as Paul was considering the Scriptures, and in these things Christ would appear to him. No longer would scriptural things be separated from the person of Christ Himself; rather, Paul would learn and experience many things in which the Lord would appear, and Paul would see Him. As a result, he would be a minister and a witness of those things in which he had seen the resurrected and ascended Christ, the Lord of glory.

When the Lord told Paul that He would send him to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:17), He charged him with this commission: “To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (v. 18). Paul refers to this charge in Ephesians 3:8 and 9, where he says that grace had been given to him “to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things.” Paul himself experienced the opening of his inner eyes, the eyes of his heart (1:18), and thus he could open the eyes of other fallen human beings. To open the eyes of the Gentiles and turn them from darkness to light was to turn them from the satanic darkness of death to the divine light of life so that, having spiritual sight and divine light, they could see the divine things in the spiritual realm. In His ministry while on earth, the Lord Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 9:2: “The people who walked in the darkness / Have seen

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a great light; / Upon those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death / Light has shined.” (cf. Matt. 4:16). In His heavenly ministry the Lord Jesus brought a great light to those sitting in darkness through His believers, members of His organic Body. Paul was such a person. In Acts 13:47 Paul quoted and applied to himself another prophecy in Isaiah: “The Lord has commanded us, ‘I have set you as a light of the Gentiles, that you would be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:6

refers to Christ as God’s Servant, whom God made a light to the Gentiles that His salvation might reach to the end of the earth. Because he was one with Christ in carrying out God’s salvation in Christ, the apostle Paul applied this prophetic word to himself in his ministry of gospel preaching. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Acts 13:47, note 1)

Based upon his being such a light in Christ, Paul, empowered by the Spirit, could turn the Gentiles from the authority of Satan, his kingdom of darkness, to God and to the kingdom of God: “Giving thanks to the Father...who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:12-13). In this delightful realm of light, life, and love, those who have had their eyes opened and who have been turned from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus, the Son of God.

#### *The Lord’s Speaking concerning Paul and to Paul*

In Acts 9:15-16 the Lord spoke to Ananias concerning Paul and in 22:14-16 Ananias spoke directly to Paul. In 9:15 the Lord said to Ananias, “This man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” The word *vessel* is of great significance in Paul’s ministry, and in his writings we see the development of this important word. God’s purpose in creating human beings was to make them vessels to receive Him and contain Him (Gen. 2:7). This is clearly revealed in Romans 9:21 and 23 and in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Romans 9:21 is unique in its revelation that God’s purpose in His creation of man is that man would be a vessel to contain Him. If we see this, we will realize that we are God’s containers and that the Triune God is our content. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul says, “The God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts,” and in the verse following he goes on to say, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.” God’s shining in our hearts brings a marvelous treasure into us—the Christ of glory, who is the embodiment and expression of the Triune God. As a chosen vessel to Christ, Paul was a “vessel unto honor” in order that God “might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory” (Rom. 9:21, 23).

**I**n Acts 22 Ananias spoke directly to Paul, saying, “Saul, brother,...the God of our fathers has previously appointed you to know His will and to see the righteous One and to hear the voice from His mouth” (vv. 13-14). This word was fulfilled repeatedly throughout the course of Paul’s ministry, especially as he was praying and having direct contact with the Lord in spirit. For instance, as he was praying in the temple, he went into a trance and saw the Lord saying to him, “Hurry, and go quickly out of Jerusalem, because they [the religious leaders] will not accept your testimony concerning Me” (vv. 7-18). In his response to the Lord, Paul expressed his view that they knew about how he had persecuted the believers and that now they would listen to him and believe his testimony of seeing the Lord and believing in Him. However, the Lord spoke again to him, saying, “Go, for I will send you forth far away to the Gentiles” (v. 21). Because Paul saw the righteous One and heard the voice from His mouth and because he had a spirit of revelation (Eph. 1:17), God’s will was made known to him, and he was eventually “filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9). As one who was “an apostle...through the will of God” (Eph. 1:1),

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Paul could speak of “the good pleasure of His will” (v. 5) and declare that we, the believers, were “predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (v. 11). Because he had been appointed to know the eternal will of God, Paul could affirm that God the Father has made “known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself” (v. 9).

### *Paul's Preaching in Acts*

Being obedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19) and directed by what he had seen and heard, Paul announced the gospel that he received “through a revelation by Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12) and proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught “the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered” (Acts 28:31). Shortly after his conversion and regeneration, he began to preach Christ, the wonderful God-man. “Immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, that this One is the Son of God” (9:20). Paul was empowered by the Spirit; therefore, “he confounded the Jews dwelling in Damascus by proving that this One is the Christ” (v. 2). In Thessalonica he spoke with those in the synagogue, reasoning with them from the Scriptures, “opening and setting before them that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead,” and saying, “This is the Christ, the Jesus whom I announce to you” (17:2-3). Appearing before King Agrippa, Paul said, “I have stood unto this day, testifying both to small and great, saying nothing apart from the things which both the prophets and Moses have said would take place, that the Christ would suffer and that He, being the first to rise from the dead, would announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (26:22-23).

While Paul was in Pisidian Antioch, he proclaimed the crucified and resurrected Christ as the Savior. In Acts 13:32-33 he taught that Christ as the Firstborn of God was promised to the fathers and that God fulfilled this promise by raising up Jesus from the dead. He, the God-man Jesus, was begotten by God in His resurrection to be the firstborn Son, possessing both divinity and humanity. Paul had been enlightened to see the Lord's resurrection in Psalm 2:7: “You are My Son; / Today I have begotten You.” Paul's applying the word *today* to the day of the Lord's resurrection reveals that Christ's resurrection was His birth as the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29). Although Paul absolutely believed that Christ is the only begotten Son of God in the eternal, unchanging Godhead, in Acts 13 he preached Christ as the firstborn Son of God with a humanity that through resurrection had been saturated with God and uplifted into the divine sonship (Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4). In Acts 13:39 Paul went on to speak of “this One,” the firstborn Son, proclaiming, “From all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified.” This is Paul's inspired gospel preaching based upon his knowing God's will, seeing the righteous One, and hearing the voice from His mouth. All his preaching in the book of Acts and his writing in his Epistles are a detailed description of the heavenly vision seen by Paul.

### *Paul in Corinth*

In his second journey Paul announced the gospel in Philippi and Thessalonica, and in both cities a number of people received his word, believed in the Lord, and were saved, and in each locality a church was established. Because of severe persecution in Thessalonica, “the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away during the night to Berea” (17:10). The Jews in the synagogue where Paul ministered God's word “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (v. 11). Many of them believed. When the Jews from Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been announced by Paul in Berea, they came to stir up the crowds, making it necessary for the brothers to send Paul away,

and those who conducted him brought him as far as Athens (vv. 13-15). Paul's spirit was "provoked within him as beheld that the city was full of idols" (v. 16), and he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout and in the marketplace "every day with those who happened to be there" (v. 17). Certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers confronted him, and others, calling him a babblers, asserted that he was "an announcer of foreign deities—because he was announcing Jesus and the resurrection as the gospel" (v. 18). Eventually, Paul was brought to the Areopagus, where he stood in their midst and proclaimed the truth concerning "an unknown God" (vv. 19-23). "What therefore you worship without knowing," he exclaimed, "this I announce to you" (v. 23). Paul proceeded to testify regarding "the God who made the world and all things in it," the One who is "Lord of heaven and earth" (v. 24), who "charges all men everywhere to repent," (v. 30), and who "has set a day in which He is to judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has designated, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead" (v. 31). To Greeks, who believed in the immortality of the soul separated from the body, a word regarding resurrection was startling, even shocking. Some scoffed, others wanted to hear more about this (v. 32), and a number "joined him and believed" (v. 34).

Shortly after these things, Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth, where he found Aquila and his wife Priscilla and worked together with them. As usual, Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, persuading both Jews and Greeks, for he was "constrained by the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (18:5). When they resisted and blasphemed, he turned from them to the Gentiles, many of whom, when they "heard, believed and were baptized" (v. 8). Once again, the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; because I Myself am with you, and no one will assail you to harm you, because I have many people in this city" (vv. 9-10). Strengthened and encouraged by this word, Paul stayed in Corinth a year and six months, "teaching the word of God among them" (v. 11). The issue of his labor in that city was the establishing of "the church of God which is in Corinth," composed of "those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints," who were one with "all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). Eventually, Paul departed from Corinth and went to Ephesus, where nearly three years later he wrote his first Epistle to the church in Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians we see what kind of person Paul was while he was with the believers in Corinth: "A man should account us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (4:1). The Lord appointed Paul to be a minister and a witness, that is, a servant appointed specifically for a certain purpose. Shamelessly speaking of himself, Paul identifies himself as "a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). As such a slave, he served God in his spirit in the gospel of His Son (v. 9), serving "in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter" (7:6). Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 is that he was a steward of the mysteries of God and that "it is sought in stewards that one be found faithful" (v. 2). The root of the Greek word for *steward* is the same as that for *economy* in Ephesians 1:10 and 1 Timothy 1:4; this indicates that as a steward, Paul was intrinsically related to God's economy, His plan and arrangement to fulfill His purpose and to accomplish His will by dispensing the divine life into the believers to produce and build up the church, the Body of Christ, for His corporate expression. The stewards in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 are stewards of the mysteries of God. In Paul's apostolic ministry the word *mystery* is central and of tremendous significance. Paul prayed that utterance would be given to him in the opening of his mouth, "to make known in boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19). This gospel, his gospel received "through a revelation by Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12), was "the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages but has now been manifested" (Rom. 16:25-26).

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In God's economy, as revealed in the New Testament, there are mainly two mysteries. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God. Christ as this mystery is God embodied, God defined, God explained, God expressed, and God made visible (2:2). The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ (v. 4). Although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ (1:22-23). The church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ (4:15-16). When we see the church, we see Christ; when we come into the church, we come into Christ; when we contact the church, we contact Christ. The church is a corporate unit produced out of Christ, who is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:30-32). The all-inclusive Christ is the mystery of the mysterious God, and such a Christ as the mystery of God produces a unit, which is the church. Mystery produces mystery; Christ, who is the mystery of God, brings forth the church, which is the mystery of Christ.

The mystery of Christ has been revealed to the apostles and prophets in their spirit by revelation (3:5). The mingled spirit is the means by which the New Testament revelation concerning Christ and the church is unveiled to the apostles and prophets. It is important for believers in Christ to realize that the mystery of Christ is made known to us by the Spirit in our regenerated spirit, which is one with the Lord (2 Tim. 4:22). When our spirit is mingled with the divine Spirit, our spirit becomes the organ in which the mystery of Christ is revealed (1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 1:17; 3:5). The mind acting independently from the spirit instead of functioning in coordination with the spirit cannot perceive or understand the mysteries in God's economy. Rather, we need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind (4:23) and thus have a mind saturated with the spirit and set on the spirit (Rom. 8:6).

Because the spirit is the primary organ of our tripartite being and is indispensable in gaining spiritual understanding, the apostle Paul prayed that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," would give to us "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of [our] heart having been enlightened" (Eph. 1:17-18). Only by having and exercising such a spirit—the human spirit joined to the divine Spirit—can we see and understand the mystery of Christ. If we are willing to learn from the apostle Paul, we will eventually realize that in order to see the hidden mysteries in God's eternal economy concerning Christ and the church, we need to exercise our spirit, be poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3), open our whole being, and pray that the Father would reveal what is in His heart concerning Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ. Then we will be able to say with Paul, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32).

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul testifies to the believers in Corinth how he came and spoke to them, announcing to them the mystery of God. Paul did not come "according to excellence of speech or of wisdom" (v. 1); he did not display excellent, superior speech or philosophical wisdom. On the contrary, his speech and proclamation were "not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" in order that their faith "would not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (vv. 4-5).

Persuasive words of wisdom issue from the human mind; demonstration of the Spirit comes forth from the spirit. The apostle's speech and preaching were not from his mind with words of speculation but from his spirit with the release and exhibition of the Spirit and, hence, of power. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 4, note 1)

The power of God in which faith stands is the word of the cross and Christ Himself (1:18, 24). Instead of being strong and unwavering in the strength of the natural life, which was glorified by the Greeks, Paul was with them "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (2:3). He declared "the word of the cross" and "Christ the

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power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:18, 24)—a matter not known by the Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians 2:2 Paul testifies to the nature of his person and ministry, saying, “I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified.” Paul knew that God, in His economy, has given us one person—Christ—and one way—the cross. The one person with the one way is the crucified Christ, who was the unique subject, center, content, and substance of Paul’s apostolic ministry. The crucified Christ presented in this Epistle is the all-inclusive Christ: the crucified Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:24), our wisdom (v. 30), the foundation upon which the church is built (3:10), the unleavened bread as our feast (5:6-8), the smitten rock out of which flowed living water (10:4), the One who died for our sins and was raised on the third day (15:3-4), the firstfruits in resurrection (v. 23), and the life-giving Spirit (v. 45). This is the Christ whom Paul knew, experienced, enjoyed, and ministered. For Paul, Christ and the cross were inseparable, and he aspired to know Him and the power of His resurrection and to be conformed to His death (Phil. 3:10).

Christ, this unique person, is versus all things, and the cross, the unique way, is versus all ways. Christ is the center of the universe, and the cross is the center of God’s government (1 Cor. 1:17-18). The way that God ordains, uplifts, and honors is the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14). God governs everything by the cross and deals with everything by the cross (Col. 1:20). The human way of solving problems is to negotiate, but God’s way is to terminate everything and everyone involved with every problematic matter. The death of Christ on the cross is God’s power to eliminate all the problems in the universe, including the devil, the source of death, and the evil principalities and powers (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:14-15); thus, Christ crucified is God’s power to abolish all negative things and carry out His plan (1 Cor. 1:23-24). The crucified Christ is the power of God, and in the cross of Christ we see God’s power manifested in defeating and terminating Satan, the world, sin, fallen humanity, the flesh, the self, the natural life, the entire old creation, the ordinances, and the middle wall of partition (Eph. 2:14-15). What tremendous power this is! It was in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ as this power that Paul came to Corinth, announcing the mystery of God and the crucified Christ as the power of God.

The issue of Paul’s continual experience of the crucified Christ was that all that he was in himself and his natural life, all that he possessed and achieved, and all that he was capable of doing were terminated, and the resurrection life of Christ permeated and saturated him and was imparted through him into the believers in Corinth, to whom he preached Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, and to whom the word of the cross was the power of God (1 Cor. 1:23, 18). In Corinth Paul preached not only Christ Himself but also Christ with the cross, bringing the unique person—Christ—and the unique way—the cross—to those who were willing to hear and receive the word of God from a man whose speech and proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in the power of God.

### The Wisdom of God versus the Wisdom of the World

*Wisdom* is a crucial word in Paul’s ministry. He came to realize that God’s wisdom is unfathomable: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and untraceable are His ways!” (Rom. 11:33). Paul learned that “through the Spirit a word of wisdom is given” (1 Cor. 12:8), and he could say to the believers in Corinth that the testimony of his conscience was that he conducted himself in the world and toward the believers not in fleshly wisdom but in “singleness and sincerity of God” (2 Cor. 1:12). Paul bears witness to the fact that God caused the riches of His grace to “abound to us in all wisdom and prudence”

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THOSE WHO BELIEVE.

(Eph. 1:8), and then he prays that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him” (v. 17). Wisdom is in the believers’ regenerated spirit that they may be able to know the mystery of God, the understanding of which far transcends the natural human mind. As Paul was writing concerning the revelation of the mystery, he unveils a marvelous aspect of God’s purpose for the church: “Now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church” (3:10). In Colossians Paul speaks about wisdom in various ways. He writes to the believers in Colossae, “Since the day we heard of it [their love in the Spirit], [we] do not cease praying and asking on your behalf that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9). He announces the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory, “admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man full-grown in Christ” (vv. 27-28). On behalf of the believers, Paul struggled that they would have “the full assurance of understanding and the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (2:2-3). In Colossians 3:16 he appeals to the believers, saying, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,” and in 4:5 he charges them, saying, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are without, redeeming the time.”

In 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:10 Paul presents a vivid contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. Paul knew that the Greeks sought wisdom (1:22) and delighted in “persuasive words of wisdom” (2:14) to the extent that they worshipped Peitho, the goddess who personified persuasion. For them, wisdom and eloquent, persuasive words had become a form of idolatry, and according to their estimate, the word of the cross was foolishness (v. 18). Quoting from Isaiah 29:14, Paul declares that God would destroy “the wisdom of the wise” (1 Cor. 1:19)—referring to the philosophical Greeks, who regarded themselves as wise in clinging to and contending for their philosophical wisdom, uplifting it as superior to all other forms of knowledge. Paul testifies that God, “who turns back the wise men, / And makes their knowledge foolish” (Isa. 44:25), has made “the wisdom of the world foolish” (1 Cor. 1:20), and then he exclaims that “in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God” (v. 21). The “foolishness of God”—the crucified Christ and the cross of Christ—“is wiser than men” (v. 25). The apostle Paul announced the mystery of God and spoke the word of the cross, conscious of the fact that “God was well pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe” (v. 21). Those who embrace the wisdom of the world will perish and witness the destruction of the wisdom of the wise, but those who respond to and receive the revelation of the foolishness of God (which is actually the wisdom of God) will be saved and enter into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ the Lord (v. 9). With the stark contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God as his basis, Paul cautions the believers in Corinth to not lapse back into their culture by considering themselves as wise: “Let no one deceive himself; if anyone thinks that he is wise among you in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (3:18-19). According to the divine thought, the way to become wise is to become foolish by receiving the word of the cross and believing in Christ, the Son of God.

### The Wisdom of God Being a Person

The wisdom of God is not merely a mode of thinking; the wisdom of God is actually a person—the all-inclusive Christ. Matthew 11:19 indicates that Christ is wisdom. “Wisdom is justified by her works.” “Wisdom” here is Christ, and those who have believed into Him, received Him, and are one with Him should follow Him as their wisdom. “Whatever Christ did was done by the wisdom of God, which is Christ Himself. This wisdom was justified, vindicated, by His wise works, His wise deeds”



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(Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 19, note 3). In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Paul explicitly and emphatically affirms the truth that Christ is the wisdom of God. In the previous verse Paul testifies, “We preach Christ crucified,” the One who did not do anything to save Himself as He was suffering on the cross, the One who drank the cup that the Father had given Him (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44; John 18:11) and who was “obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross” (Phil. 2:8). This crucified Christ is the wisdom of God. The more we experience the crucified Christ, the more He becomes the wisdom of God to us and lives in us as the One who, as wisdom, is God’s way to fulfill His will and accomplish His eternal purpose (Eph. 1:4-5, 9, 11). To have Christ as our wisdom is to have Christ as the way (John 14:6) to live the Christian life, to practice the genuine church life, to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and to consecrate ourselves to the Lord, placing our lives in His hand and allowing Him to direct our steps and to saturate us with Himself by making His home in our heart.

Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 1:24 concerning Christ’s being wisdom is primarily an assertion of the crucial objective truth that in Himself Christ is the wisdom of God, for “the only wise God” (Rom. 16:27) is embodied in Him and expressed through Him. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul encourages the believers by presenting Christ as wisdom in a subjective, experiential way: “Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God.” In this brief statement there are four crucial matters. The first is “of Him,” which refers to God as the unique source. “There is one God, the Father, out from whom are all things” (8:6). Paul confirms this by saying that “all things are out from God” (11:12). God is the One out from whom are all things, and we are “in Christ Jesus” because God the Father in an amazing way has put us in Christ, causing us to enter into an organic union with Christ. When Christ was crucified, we were in Him, and thus, we were crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20). Now, in our union with the resurrected Christ, we are seated “together with Him in the heavenlies” (Eph. 2:6), and simultaneously, we are branches in Christ as the true vine, partaking of all that He is and has (John 15:5). Furthermore, the all-inclusive Christ in whom we are “became wisdom to us.” God has always been wisdom in Himself, for wisdom is an eternal, immutable attribute of God, but in order to *become* wisdom to us, it was necessary for Him to pass through the processes of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to become, in the divine economy, the indwelling Christ. Because we are in Him and He is in us, the wisdom that He always was in Himself has become wisdom to us, wisdom imparted to us, shared with us, experienced by us, and manifested in us. Christ has become wisdom to us “from God.” Whereas *of Him* indicates that God is the source, *from God* indicates that wisdom is continually being transmitted into us to supply us with Christ as our wisdom for our Christian life and church life. Christ is both the wisdom of God in Himself objectively and wisdom to us subjectively through an ongoing transmission from God, who is Spirit, into our regenerated human spirit, dispensing into us the wonderful Christ in whom are all the treasures of wisdom.

At this juncture it is fitting, and also enlightening, to compare Paul’s view of wisdom with James’s view. What James says about wisdom exhibits an Old Testament flavor and is described not as a person but as something given to us by God to enrich and uplift the Christian life in practicality: “If any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and does not reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). For James, wisdom is a characteristic of a believer’s daily life. “Who is wise and understanding among you?” he asks; he goes on to say, “Let him show by his good manner of life his works in meekness of wisdom” (3:13). This exhortation is followed by a weighty word about a perverted and destructive type of wisdom that is related to one’s inward bitterness, jealousy, and ambition: “If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which descends from above, but is earthly, soulish,

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demonic" (vv. 14-15). That which does not descend from above is contrary to "all good giving and every perfect gift," which is "from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (1:17). The wisdom from below, from the abyss, is inseparable from bitterness, jealousy, and selfish ambition in boasting and lying against the truth. Such wisdom is an element of fallen human beings into whom the satanic nature has been injected by the father of lies (John 8:44), producing in them a mode of thinking and speaking that is earthly, soulish, and demonic. "Earthly refers to the world, soulish to the natural man, and demonic to the devil and his demons. These three are always linked to one another" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, James 3:15, note 2). After exposing the nature of earthly, soulish, and demonic wisdom, James points his readers to the wisdom from above, that is, the wisdom given by God to those who lack it and ask for it: "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, without hypocrisy" (v. 17). This kind of wisdom is ethical and consists of meekness and human virtues such as purity, peacefulness, forbearance, and impartiality. This ethical and moralistic wisdom—the wisdom advocated by James—is far below the wisdom taught by Paul, which is not merely a character trait or something given by God but is actually the person of Christ Himself, who has become the "wisdom to us from God" that is being dispensed into believers who exercise their spirit to live in an organic union with Christ. Paul prayed for new believers to have spiritual wisdom and understanding and ministered to them Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom. For Paul, God's wisdom in Christ is a multifarious wisdom that will eventually be manifested through the church as the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5) to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies, putting them to shame and vindicating God regarding His eternal purpose.

#### God's Wisdom in a Mystery Predestinated for Our Glory

Paul spoke of Christ as wisdom "among those who are full-grown" (1 Cor. 2:6) and thus have the capacity to know and experience the wisdom that has been hidden in God. In verse 7 Paul links God's wisdom to mystery—the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ, and, in particular, the mystery of God's will concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 1:9). Understanding God's wisdom in a mystery requires that we see "what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things" (3:9).

In the Bible a mystery refers not only to things that are hidden and unknown to us but also to things that are hidden in God's heart; this is the principle concerning the mysteries mentioned in the Bible (Mark 4:11; Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). God's mystery is His hidden purpose, which is to dispense Himself into His chosen people; hence, there is an economy of the mystery of God (3:9). From the beginning of the world the purpose of creation was a mystery hidden in God; no one knew what the purpose of creation was (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16). Job was right in saying, "You have hidden these things in Your heart; / I know that this is with You"; what was hidden in God's heart was the mystery of the ages (Job 10:13; Eph. 3:9). After creating man in His image and according to His likeness, God kept His intention hidden throughout the ages (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 16:25). Before the New Testament time, God did not unveil to anyone what His purpose was; the mystery, God's hidden purpose, was made known by revelation to the apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:3-5). The mystery hidden in God's heart is His eternal economy (1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4), which is God's eternal intention with His heart's desire to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity as the Father in the Son by the Spirit into His chosen people to be their life and nature so that they may be the same as He is as His duplication (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2), to become an organism, the Body of Christ as the new man (Eph. 2:15-16), for God's fullness, God's expression (1:22-23; 3:19), which will become the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2—22:5).

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Paul preached not only the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ; he also preached the gospel concerning the economy of the mystery hidden in God (Eph. 3:8-9). The gospel concerning the economy of the mystery hidden in God is to produce the church for God's expression and glorification according to God's eternal purpose (vv. 10-11, 21). Paul preached the gospel concerning the mystery hidden in God in order to enlighten all so that they may see what is the economy of the mystery hidden in God, who created all things for the fulfillment of His will, the desire of His heart, and His eternal purpose (1:5, 9, 11; 3:8-11).

This mystery is intrinsically related to the mystery mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:7. Paul's word concerning a mysterious wisdom is based on his assertion in 1:24 that Christ is God's wisdom. God's wisdom in a mystery, which was hidden in God, is the all-inclusive Christ with His unsearchable riches and immeasurable dimensions (Eph. 3:8, 18). In contrast to the perspective of the philosophical Greeks and of James, the revelation disclosed by Paul is that true wisdom, the wisdom of God, is Christ. Paul was burdened that the believers would be enlightened to see that this wisdom is absolutely different from the wisdom of this age and the wisdom from the rulers of this age. The wisdom that is Christ is eternal and is a crucial aspect of God's eternal will and eternal purpose.

God's wisdom in a mystery hidden in God is the wisdom which "God predestinated before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7). *The ages*, a Jewish expression that denotes the universe, refers not to time but to the universe created and unfolded through successive ages, periods of time. For the divine wisdom in a mystery to be predestinated before the ages means that it was predestinated before the creation of the universe, that is, before the existence of time and space. A key word here is *predestinated*. To predestinate is to mark out and determine beforehand the final outcome, or the destiny, of a certain matter or person. "Marking out beforehand is the process, whereas predestination is the purpose, which is to determine a destiny beforehand. God selected us before the foundation of the world, marking us out beforehand unto a certain destiny" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Eph. 1:5, note 1). God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (vv. 4-5). Our destiny, determined by God before the creation of the universe, is to be sons of God for His expression. Paul strengthens his word in verse 5, saying that we were "predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (v. 11). Predestination is essentially related to the good pleasure of God's will—the desire of His heart (which is of His will)—and the counsel of His will—His consideration of the way to accomplish His will and thus to satisfy His heart's desire.

Our being predestinated unto sonship involves two other aspects of predestination. "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28), because "those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers" (v. 29). As those who have been predestinated unto sonship, we have also been predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son, who, in verse 29, is not just the only begotten Son but also the firstborn Son with both divinity and humanity. We are being transformed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18) and also being conformed to the image of the firstborn Son. "And those whom He predestinated, these He also called" (Rom. 8:30). The God who predestinated us before the existence of space and time has called us in time through the gospel concerning His Son (1:3-4). He called us because He chose us "from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thes. 2:13). This was the experience of the believers in Corinth, to whom Paul wrote these endearing words:

AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PREDESTINATED UNTO SONSHIP, WE HAVE ALSO BEEN PREDESTINATED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF GOD'S SON, WHO IS NOT JUST THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON BUT ALSO THE FIRSTBORN SON WITH BOTH DIVINITY AND HUMANITY.

GOD'S ETERNAL  
GOAL, BASED UPON  
HIS WILL, HEART'S  
DESIRE, AND PURPOSE,  
IS TO BRING HIS MANY  
SONS INTO GLORY.  
IN ORDER TO REACH  
THIS GOAL, GOD  
CREATED MAN  
IN HIS IMAGE  
SO THAT MAN  
MAY EXPRESS HIM  
IN HIS GLORY.

“Though you have ten thousand guides in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). To them he wrote about another aspect of the predestination mentioned in Ephesians 1:5 and 11 and Romans 8:29: “God’s wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). This mysterious, hidden wisdom is nothing other than Christ, who is the wisdom of God. We have been predestinated unto sonship and we have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son, and for this God’s wisdom is a wisdom that has been predestinated for our glory. “Our glory” in verse 7 is the “the Lord of glory” in verse 8. God predestinated us not only to receive His life and thus be His sons but also to be those into whom He could enter and those He could fill with His glory to express His glorious being.

The glory of God—the expression of God in splendor—is a central matter in the will, purpose, and economy of God. The Triune God is a God of glory (Acts 7:2). The Father is the Father of glory (Eph. 1:17) with “the riches of His glory” (3:16); Christ the Son is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8), with the glory of God in “the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6); and the Spirit is designated as “the Spirit of glory” resting upon the believers in Christ (1 Pet. 4:14). God’s eternal goal, based upon His will, heart’s desire, and purpose, is to bring His many sons into glory (Heb. 2:10; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5-6, 12, 14). In order to reach this goal, God created man in His image so that man may express Him in His glory (Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6). God created human beings to be vessels unto honor, prepared unto glory, having predestinated them in His sovereignty to be vessels to express what He is in glory (Rom. 9:21, 23). Sadly, the man whom God created to express Him sinned against Him by disobeying Him, becoming a sinner constituted with sin, a satanic element having been injected into him. To sin is to fall short of God’s glory and thus to express sin and the sinful self and to love the glory of men more than the glory of God (3:23; John 5:44; 7:18; 12:43). However, there is good news—the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:3-4). The glory of God is involved with Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (John 1:14; 7:18, 39; 8:50, 54; 12:23-24; 17:5; Matt. 17:2; Luke 24:26; Acts 3:13; Heb. 2:9-10; 6:19-20; 9:24). Christ is the image of God and the effulgence of His glory; hence, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of His glory that illuminates and shines into human hearts (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Christ’s redemption has fulfilled the requirements of God’s glory (Rom. 3:24-25; Heb. 9:5; cf. Gen. 3:24), and through the gospel of the glory of Christ, God has called us by and into His eternal glory (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Thes. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3). Because we have believed into the only begotten Son to receive eternal life (John 3:15), have believed that God raised Him from the dead, and have called on His name, confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9), the pneumatic Christ now dwells in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27; 3:4, 11; 1 Cor. 15:45). When the Lord Jesus comes again, He will be glorified in us (2 Thes. 1:10); this means that His glory will be manifested from within us, and Christ “will transfigure the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21). Presently, as we behold and reflect the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the image of the resurrected Christ from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Eventually, we will arrive at the goal and the last stage of God’s organic salvation—our glorification (Rom. 5:10; 8:17, 21, 30; Heb. 2:10).

**F**or this we need Christ as the wisdom of God in a mystery, which God predestinated for our glory. “Our glory” in 1 Corinthians 2:7 is corporate—the corporate expression of the Lord of glory in the church as the Body of Christ. When we are strengthened with power by the Father of glory through His Spirit into our inner man, when Christ makes His home in our hearts, and when we are filled unto all the fullness of God, there will be glory in the church (Eph. 3:14-21). The Lord Jesus prayed concerning this when He asked the Father to bring all His people into the highest degree of oneness—the oneness in the divine glory for the corporate expression of the

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Triune God (John 17:22). This oneness is necessary for the fulfillment of the Lord's great prophecy: "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). The church as God's building is actually the Triune God wrought into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people so that they may become His glorious corporate expression (Eph. 2:21-22; 3:17, 19, 21; 4:16; 5:27; cf. Exo. 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek. 43:4; Hag. 2:7, 9). The glory of God accompanies the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10, 13). God has called us to enter into His kingdom and glory (1 Thes. 2:12). The kingdom of God is the sphere for His sons to worship and enjoy Him under the divine ruling with a view of entering into His glory. Paul's labor with the new believers nourished them, cherished them, and fostered them to walk in a manner worthy of God so that they might be able to enter into His kingdom and partake of His glory. Since the kingdom of God and the glory of God are inseparable, the glory of God will be manifested in the coming kingdom (Matt. 6:13; 16:27; 25:31; Rev. 5:13). An outstanding feature of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth (21:1-2) is that it has the glory of God, His expression. The entire city of New Jerusalem will bear the glory of God, which is God Himself in Christ as the lamp shining out through the city (vv. 10-11, 23). The ultimate goal of God's economy is that as the holy city, New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God, we all shine forth His glory. The wisdom of God's mystery—the all-inclusive Christ—has been imparted into us for our glory.

### Christ as God's Wisdom in a Mystery Prepared for Those Who Love Him

We need to be deeply impressed with the revealed truth that God's wisdom is a person—Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God; therefore, knowing and experiencing this mysterious wisdom is a profoundly personal matter. If we do not have a personal and affectionate relationship with the Lord Jesus, if we do not experience and enjoy the all-inclusive Christ, we cannot truly know the wisdom of God in a mystery. Our relationship with the Lord, with whom we are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), is wholly dependent on love from Him and for Him, emphasized elsewhere in 1 Corinthians (8:1, 3; 13:1-13; 16:22). Real love has its source in God Himself (1 John 4:19) and, on our part, requires the exercise of our entire being (Mark 12:30). After speaking of God's wisdom in a mystery predestinated for our glory, Paul goes on to mention a matter of tremendous significance: We cannot know and experience Christ as God's wisdom in a mystery unless we love Him. "As it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Cor. 2:9). We must love the One who is the wisdom of God, loving not with our natural, human love but with the love that has a divine source.

Love is the essence of God, the inner substance of God. Love is from God; it originates with God, not with us. Eventually, as the apostle John reveals, God's love for us becomes our love for Him. "Love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. He who does not love has not known God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). God Himself not only has the attribute of love—God is love. As children of God (3:2), we should know and believe "the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him" (4:16). What a marvelous reality it is that the love of God, which is in us, is actually God Himself in His essence! When we abide in love, we abide in God, and God as love abides in us. God as the love in us enables us to love, for, as John affirms, "we love because He first loved us" (v. 19). "God first loved us in that He infused us with His love and generated within us the love with which we love Him" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 19, note 1).

Love is also the Triune God dispensed into us. This is proved by Paul's presentation of the divine love in Romans, where he speaks of the love of God, the love of Christ, and the love of the Spirit (5:5; 8:35, 39; 15:30). Love is the processed and consummated

PAUL'S LABOR  
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THEM, CHERISHED  
THEM, AND  
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SO THAT THEY  
MIGHT BE ABLE  
TO ENTER INTO  
HIS KINGDOM AND  
PARTAKE OF HIS GLORY.

TO EXPERIENCE THE  
LOVE POURED OUT IN  
OUR HEARTS IS TO  
EXPERIENCE LOVE AS  
GOD'S ESSENCE AND  
TO JOYFULLY RECEIVE  
THE LOVE OF GOD  
IN CHRIST AS THE  
SPIRIT DISPENSED INTO  
OUR INWARD PARTS,  
CONSTITUTING US WITH  
LOVE AND MOTIVATING  
US TO LOVE HIM.

Triune God in His economy dispensed into us and wrought into our inner being. "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (5:5). To experience the love poured out in our hearts is to experience love as God's essence and to joyfully receive the love of God in Christ as the Spirit dispensed into our inward parts, constituting us with love and motivating us to love Him. As we experience the divine love being dispensed into us, we gradually advance in our understanding of what it means to love the Lord. To love the Lord is to appreciate Him (Matt. 26:6-13), to direct our whole being toward Him (2 Cor. 3:16; Mark 12:30), to open our spirit and soul, with our heart, to Him, and to give Him the first place, the preeminence in all things, thereby maintaining and developing our first love and doing the first works, which are motivated by and express our first love (Col. 1:18; Rev. 2:4-5). To love the Lord is also to enjoy Him, to be one with Him, to abide in Him, and to live Him (1 Cor. 6:17; John 15:4-5, 10). Ultimately, to love the Lord is to be permeated and saturated with the Triune God as love to the extent that we actually become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. God, who is love, constitutes us with Himself as love, causing us to not only have love but even to become love. In this particular way, we became the same as God in life and nature. The lines of an ancient hymn speak of this: "Whate're thou lovest, man, / That too become thou must; / God, if thou lovest God, / Dust, if thou lovest dust" (*Hymns*, #477, stanza 2).

### The Depths of God Revealed and Made Known to Us by the Spirit

Concerning the things which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and which have never come up in the human heart, Paul says something amazing in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11: "To us God has revealed them through the Spirit," for no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God, who "searches all things, even the depths of God." To us—all the believers, not only the apostles—the mysterious things hidden in God have been revealed by the Spirit of God. This is the work of the Spirit of reality about whom the Lord Jesus spoke in John 14:17 and 15:26. In the whole universe only One is God; the Triune God is the reality (14:6; 1 John 5:20). In God's New Testament economy the Spirit has the attribute of reality, and this reality includes the Father, Christ the Son, and all divine things. The Spirit, therefore, is the all-inclusive divine reality. The eyes of our heart need to be enlightened to see that the Spirit of reality is the reality of the Triune God; that is, He is the reality of all that the Triune God is, all that He has accomplished, and all that He has attained and obtained (John 14:17; 15:26).

A part from the functioning of the Spirit of reality within us, in our experience we cannot have the Triune God or any of the divine attributes. The Spirit of reality not only is the reality Himself, but this Spirit guides us, the believers in Christ, as the children of God, into the divine reality: "When He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak" (John 16:13). The Spirit of reality will glorify the Son because He, the Spirit, will receive what is the Son's and declare it. This thought is continued in verse 15: "All that the Father has is Mine; for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you." The Spirit of reality guides into the reality of the Triune God all believers who are open to Him and willing to be enlightened and guided by Him. In verse 13 *reality* refers to what the Father has, what the Son has, and what the Spirit receives of the Son and of what the Father has. What the Father has is reality, what the Son has is reality, and what the Spirit receives is also reality. What the Father has becomes the Son's, what the Son has is received by the Spirit, and what the Spirit receives is disclosed to us (15:26). Furthermore, through the Spirit of reality, the reality of the Triune God is transmitted into us, entering into and gradually penetrating our inner being. The outcome of this transmission is marvelous beyond description. As the Spirit of reality guides us into the divine reality by transmitting this reality into us, the divine reality becomes the constituent of our being (Eph. 3:14-17).

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## The Spirit Revealing the Depths of God

The Spirit unveils to us, the believers, the secret, hidden, mysterious, and concealed things that God has prepared for us—the depths of God. The Spirit, who searches all things, searches the depths of God and reveals them to the believers for their spiritual understanding and experience (1 Cor. 2:10). The expression *the depths of God* refers to the deep and mysterious things of God, which have been predestinated by God for the believers' participation and constitution. Thoughts concerning the depths of God have never entered the mind of the unbelievers, the natural human mind, for these mysterious matters are beyond human understanding. This is also the situation of Christians who continue to walk in the vanity of the mind (Eph. 4:17). Sadly, there are persons who are genuine believers in Christ, children of God born of God to have the divine, uncreated life in their regenerated spirit, and yet do not know the depths of God as the hidden and mysterious things that have been revealed to through the Spirit. We need to know God according to His depths—the divine matters that God regards as deep.

In order to know the depths of God revealed through the Spirit, we need to see and realize that Christ Himself is the depths of God, the deep things of God, for He is the mystery of God, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:2-3). Christ is the depth of the universe because His dimensions are the dimensions of the universe (Eph. 3:18). If we carefully consider the entire content of 1 Corinthians, an Epistle that presents Christ in His all-inclusiveness, we will realize that the depths of God are not mere divine, spiritual elements or an impersonal substance deep in God's being; we will eventually realize that the depths of God are the all-inclusive Christ. This view is supported by Colossians, the Epistle that contains and conveys a revelation of Christ as God with the divine attributes, as man with the human virtues, and the reality of all positive things (2:16-17). Only the Spirit of reality can search and make Christ real to us as the depths of God. The Spirit explores the depths of God concerning Christ and reveals them to us in our spirit for our realization and participation. As we advance in the experience and enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ, we will enter into Christ as the depths of God through the Spirit who searches and leads us into these depths, making the deep things of God real to us. Gradually, we will realize that when we enter into Christ as the depths of God, we simultaneously enter into the heart of God and experience Christ as the deep things of God becoming the constituent of our inner being.

First Corinthians 2:11 says, "The things of God...no one has known except the Spirit of God." Knowing Christ as the depths of God is absolutely dependent on the Spirit, who not only searches these depths but also knows them. How can we know what only the Spirit knows? The answer is in Paul's word in verse 12: "We have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been graciously given to us by God." The Spirit is the unique way of knowing the depths of God; the Spirit is the sole way of obtaining knowledge of the mysterious things hidden in the depths of God. We can learn about the depths of God by studying the Word of God; however, we can obtain true spiritual knowledge only from the Spirit. In addition to the application of proper hermeneutics, we need the only reliable and trustworthy epistemology—the epistemology of the Spirit. From the written word we know about the deep things of God; from the Spirit we know the deep things of God. When we begin to advance from merely knowing about to actually knowing the depths of God, we may echo the words of Job: "I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, / But now my eye has seen You; / Therefore I abhor myself, and I repent / In dust and ashes" (42:5-6).

### *The Importance of the Human Spirit in Knowing the Depths of God*

A crucial matter in 1 Corinthians 2:11 is Paul's word concerning the two spirits: "Who

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among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also no one has known except the Spirit of God.” Paul surely was familiar with Proverbs 20:27: “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, / Searching all the innermost parts of the inner being.” In his personal experience as a man in Christ, he undoubtedly learned what it means for light to shine from his regenerated spirit throughout all his inward parts, thoroughly illuminating his entire being. In his writing to the church of God in Corinth, Paul emphasizes not only the divine Spirit but also the human spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 4:21 he asks the believers this question: “Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?” A spirit of meekness is a regenerated human spirit that is permeated with the meekness of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1), expressing this particular virtue of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul makes a statement of immeasurable spiritual significance: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” To be joined to the Lord, the resurrected, indwelling Christ, is to be one with Him through an organic union with Him as the issue of our believing into Him (John 3:15) and our being baptized into Him (Rom. 6:3). *One spirit*

indicates the mingling of the Lord as the Spirit with our spirit. Our spirit has been regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6), who is now in us (v. 19) and is one with our spirit (Rom. 8:16). This is the realization of the Lord, who became the life-giving Spirit through resurrection (15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17) and who is now with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 Cor. 6:17, note 2)

In 1 Corinthians Paul refers to the human spirit in various ways: “In his spirit he speaks mysteries” (14:2); “My spirit prays,” “I will pray with the spirit,” and “I will sing with the spirit” (vv. 14-15); “You bless with the spirit” (v. 16); “The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (v. 32); and “They refreshed my spirit and yours” (16:18).

If we would experience the Spirit’s revealing Christ as the wisdom of God in a mystery and if we would learn from the Spirit the deep things of God, we need to appreciate the vital importance of the human spirit and realize our need to be in spirit (Rom. 1:9), to serve in newness of spirit (7:6), to be conscious of the fact that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit (8:16), to exercise our spirit, and to be able to discern the spirit from the soul (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). If we are not in spirit and do not exercise our spirit, we will be unable to understand our own inner being, because only our spirit knows what we truly are in the inner depths (1 Cor. 2:11). If we are not in spirit and do not exercise our spirit as a spirit of wisdom and revelation, we will not have the full knowledge of God (Eph. 1:17). If we are not in spirit and do not exercise the spirit, we cannot fathom the revelation given to the apostle John (Rev. 1:10).

If we are not in spirit and do not exercise our spirit, we cannot perceive the meaning of the universe or know why we exist as human beings on earth. “Thus declares Jehovah, who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1).

In His creation God made three crucial, equally important items—the heavens, the earth, and the spirit of man. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man was created by God with a spirit that he may contact God, receive God, worship God, live God, fulfill God’s purpose for God, and be one with God. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 1, note 2)

God created us as tripartite persons with a body, a soul, and a spirit (1 Thes. 5:23). Our spirit and soul are closely related, but they are not identical; therefore, we need to discern between the spirit and the soul and experience the dividing of soul and spirit. With our spirit we receive the Spirit’s revelation of the deep things of God, and



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with our mind (the leading part of the soul) we are able to understand and communicate what the Spirit has dispensed into our spirit.

### Speaking in Words Taught by the Spirit

Referring to the deep things of God that the Spirit reveals and makes known to us—“the things which have been graciously given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12)—Paul says, “Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words” (v. 13). The Spirit functions not only in revealing Christ as the wisdom of God and the depths of God but also in teaching the things of God. Here we see two radically different kinds of words: “words taught by human wisdom” and “words taught by the Spirit.” The indwelling Spirit is grieved when preachers use words taught by human wisdom to attempt to communicate the divine truths in the Scriptures. The Spirit flows freely through ministers of the Word who have been broken, humbled, disciplined, and trained to never utter words of human wisdom but to obey the anointing (1 John 2:20, 27) by speaking with words taught by the Spirit. Because he was taught by the Spirit to speak spiritual things with spiritual words, the apostle Paul did not display “excellence of speech or of wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:1); therefore, he could testify to the Corinthians, saying, “My speech and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom” (v. 4). The words Paul employed in announcing the gospel and teaching the truth were words taught by the Spirit, causing his speech to be a “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (v. 4).

Only words taught by the Spirit demonstrate the power of the Spirit. In verse 13 the Greek word used for *spiritual things* is used also for *spiritual words*. A literal translation would be “interpreting spiritual things with spiritual things,” indicating that the spiritual things and spiritual words used to communicate are essentially the same. Nevertheless, it is correct to say that in Paul’s usage in this verse the same term has two meanings: the spiritual things themselves and the words used in speaking these spiritual things. Paul spoke spiritual things—the deep things of God concerning Christ as the mystery of God—by spiritual things—the words taught by the Spirit. Spiritual things are designated and interpreted with spiritual words, and these spiritual words are spiritual things used to describe spiritual things. Speaking spiritual things with spiritual words was Paul’s way of communicating the divine revelation concerning the depths of God. Paul realized that speaking according to human wisdom—in this case, Greek philosophical wisdom—is natural, not spiritual, but the words taught by the Spirit of God to interpret and communicate spiritual things truly are spiritual things. For Paul spiritual things are both the things given to us by God through the Spirit and also the words taught by the Spirit. Those who aspire to minister God’s word to His people need to learn from Paul and follow his pattern to speak spiritual things by spiritual things. This requires that we live in the fellowship into which God has called us—“the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:9)—experience God’s destruction of the natural and worldly wisdom in us, and allow the Spirit to apply the effectiveness of the cross to every aspect of our fallen being, reducing us to nothing and then constituting us with the all-inclusive Christ, who is the wisdom and the depths of God. It is a wonderful blessing to hear one who teaches spiritual things taught by spiritual words, and it is absolutely God’s mercy manifested on vessels of mercy to be trained by Him to speak spiritual things with words taught by the Spirit in our spirit.

### Being Soulsh or Spiritual in Relation to Knowing the Depths of God

First Corinthians reveals that a believer may be one of three kinds of persons. A believer may be a spiritual person, living in his spirit under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:25; 1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17). A spiritual person is one who does not behave

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A SOULISH PERSON IS NATURAL, ONE WHO ALLOWS THE SOUL (INCLUDING THE MIND, THE EMOTION, AND THE WILL) TO DOMINATE HIS ENTIRE BEING AND WHO LIVES BY THE SOUL, IGNORING THE SPIRIT, NOT USING THE SPIRIT, AND EVEN BEHAVING AS IF HE DID NOT HAVE A SPIRIT.

according to the flesh or act according to the soulish life but lives according to the spirit, that is, his spirit mingled with the Spirit of God; such a person is ruled and controlled by his spirit (2:15). A spiritual person denies the soul-life and does not live by the soul-life but allows the regenerated spirit, which is occupied and energized by the Spirit of God, to dominate his entire being. A spiritual person is dominated, governed, directed, moved, and led by his mingled spirit (5:3-5; 6:17; 2 Cor. 2:13-14). A believer may be a soulish person, living in his soul under the direction of his soul, his natural life (1 Cor. 2:14). A soulish person is natural, one who allows the soul (including the mind, the emotion, and the will) to dominate his entire being and who lives by the soul, ignoring the spirit, not using the spirit, and even behaving as if he did not have a spirit (Jude 19). Such a person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God and is not able to know the depths of God; to such natural, soulish persons the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness (1 Cor. 1:22-23). A believer may also be a fleshy and fleshly person, being of the flesh and living in the flesh under the influence of the nature of the flesh (3:1, 3). "*Fleshy* denotes being made of flesh; *fleshly* denotes being influenced by the nature of the flesh and partaking of the character of the flesh" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 1, note 2). The jealousy and strife among the Corinthian believers show that they walked according to the flesh of the fallen man and not according to the human spirit regenerated by God (vv. 3-4; 1:11-12; Gal. 5:19-21). The Lord desires that all His believers would receive grace to be spiritual persons, for only this kind of person can be transformed for and built up in the Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 Paul presents a vivid contrast between a soulish person and a spiritual person: "A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually. But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one."

Verse 13 stresses the spiritual means, that is, the spiritual words with which the spiritual things are spoken. Verses 14 and 15 stress the spiritual object, that is, a spiritual man (not a soulish man), who is able to discern the spiritual things. Both the means and the object need to be spiritual. The spiritual things must be spoken with spiritual words to the spiritual man. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 14, note 1)

**A**s believers in Christ, we can either live by the soul and belong to the soul, thereby becoming a soulish person, or we can live by the regenerated spirit and belong to the spirit, thereby becoming a spiritual person. A spiritual person is one who lives and walks by his spirit, one whose soul is always subdued by the spirit. A soulish person is a person who lives by the soul and in the soul. A soulish person is natural; this kind of person is one who lives by the soul, that is, by the mind, by the emotion, and by the will. He does things, lives, and acts always by his mind, emotion, and will. A soulish person cannot understand the things of God. There is no potential for him to know spiritual things because he does not have the spiritual discernment. He simply cannot discern spiritual things, because he does not exercise his spirit, which is the organ for knowing spiritual things. A spiritual person can discern the things of the Spirit of God, but a soulish person cannot receive and know these things.

A spiritual person lives in the spirit, has the sense of the spirit, understands spiritual things, knows the ways of God from within, and is proficient in spiritual things. Although spiritual persons may be strong in the organs of the soul—the mind, emotion, and will—even stronger than many soulish persons, they do not live in these organs or by them. Rather, spiritual persons live by the spirit and in the spirit, and they allow the spirit to be the source of all their behavior. The spirit in spiritual persons occupies the most prominent position; it is the starting point of all action. The organs of the soul of spiritual persons are subjected to and directed by the spirit. Such persons use the mind, emotion, and will in their soul but they do not allow these organs to act independent of the spirit. Soulish persons allow their soul to dominate their

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being; spiritual persons allow their spirit to direct their whole being so that they may follow the sense of the spirit. Once they recognize the sense and leading of the spirit, they use the mind to understand the sense of the spirit, the emotion to express the sense of the spirit, and the will to carry out the sense of the spirit. A soulish person ignores or denies the existence of the spirit, whereas a spiritual person exercises the spirit, follows the sense and leading of the spirit, and then, under the direction of the spirit, uses the mind, emotion, and will in the soul to live and take action according to the spirit. "Such a spiritual person is able to discern the things of the Spirit of God because his constitutional capacity for spiritual perception is able to manifest its function" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 Cor. 2:15, note 1). In addition to this capacity, a spiritual person sets his mind on the spirit (Rom. 8:6) experiences the renewing of the mind (12:2), and gradually comes to know the deep thoughts of the true and living God, thoughts which are higher than all human thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

### *The Mind of Christ*

In 1 Corinthians 2:16, a conclusion to Paul's speaking regarding the depths of God, Paul makes a remarkable statement: "We have the mind of Christ." *We* refers to those in verses 6 and 7 who speak God's wisdom in a mystery and minister spiritual things by spiritual words to spiritual persons. These spiritual persons are not only regenerated in their spirit but also have the mind of Christ, the mind that enables one to think as Christ thinks and to know what Christ knows. If we consider verse 16 in the light of other portions in the Epistles of Paul, we will understand why he could declare that he, and other spiritual persons, have the mind of Christ.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The Greek phrase translated "let this mind be in you" may be rendered literally as "think this in you." For the mind of Christ to be in us means that His thinking becomes our thinking because we allow this kind of mind to become our mind. The mind of Christ is actually Christ Himself, for the person of Christ, the God-man, is manifested in His mind. The Lord Jesus will not force His mind into us but will wait until we are willing for this to become our experience and inward reality. We need to open our inner being and let, allow, "this mind" to be in us. If we open ourselves to the Lord and let His mind be in us, the thinking in us will become the thinking that was in Christ when He emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, humbled Himself, and was found in fashion as a man (vv. 7-8). To have this mind requires us to be one with Christ in His inward parts (1:8) and to give Him the freedom to make His home in our heart, in all the inward parts of our tripartite being. To experience Christ in this way, we need to be one with Him in His tender, inward parts and in His thinking.

**B**ecause Paul let the mind of Christ be in him, he experienced the renewing of the mind about which he speaks in Ephesians 4:23 and Romans 12:2. In Ephesians 4 there is a contrast between those who live in the vanity of the mind and those who are being renewed in the spirit of the mind: "This therefore I say and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding...because of the ignorance which is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (vv. 17-18). *Vanity* denotes lack of genuine value, hollowness, and worthlessness. Fallen human beings are vain in their reasonings (Rom. 1:21); they walk without God in the vanity of their mind and are governed and directed by their vain thoughts. Whatever they do according to their fallen mind is vanity. Because their mind is filled with vanity, their understanding is darkened regarding the things of God. Paul was concerned that believers might continue to live in the vanity of the fallen, darkened mind. The words *no longer* in Ephesians 4:17 are directed to genuine believers in Christ, who have been regenerated in their spirit and have received the life of God but who may still walk, have their living, in the vanity of the fallen human mind. All believers must realize that it is possible to remain under

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the control of the mind of vanity even after they have been regenerated. As believers in Christ, we should no longer walk in the vanity of the mind; instead, we should live and have our being in the reality of our spirit, the reality in Jesus (vv. 20-21).

After we have been regenerated in our spirit, our mind, thoughts, and thinking need to be renewed. Because the mind is the leading part of the soul, it is especially important that we be renewed in the mind; therefore, Paul charges the believers, saying, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (v. 23). The mind is renewed not by outward teachings but by the element of the indwelling pneumatic Christ being added to it inwardly and intrinsically. Being renewed in the spirit of the mind is an ongoing process in which the mingled spirit—the divine Spirit mingled with the regenerated human spirit—penetrates and saturates the mind. A regenerated spirit is a renewed spirit that is strengthened with power (3:16) in order to spread into, subdue, and occupy every part of the soul, beginning with the mind. Christ as the life-giving Spirit is in the believers’ regenerated spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and these two spirits are mingled together to form the spirit of the mind. When the life-giving Spirit, who dwells in and is mingled with our spirit, spreads into our mind, the mingled spirit becomes the spirit of our mind. It is by the mingled spirit spreading into and saturating the mind that our mind is renewed. On our part, we need to be in the spirit and allow the mingled spirit to penetrate and occupy our mind; then we will be renewed in the spirit of the mind and have the mind of Christ.

Paul’s teaching concerning the renewing of the mind is supported by his word in Romans 12:2: “Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind.” *This age* refers to the present manifestation in space and time of the satanic world system. “The whole world lies in the evil one” (1 John 5:19). The world in all its aspects is a satanic system that opposes God and the will of God. The world, the evil system of Satan, is the composition of all people, matters, and things outside of God, and this system is composed of many different ages, each having its own particular, pattern, characteristic, fashions, styles, and trends. To be fashioned, or conformed, to this age is to be governed by the spirit of the age and to adopt the values, views, and goals of the age. The god of this age (John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4) is continuously rebelling and fighting against God and His will, and the battleground is the human mind. Satan, the enemy of God, wants to possess the mind, and God desires to renew the mind of the believers who are willing to consecrate themselves to Him and are not being conformed to the present age. As one who had received mercy from God to be delivered “out of the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:4), Paul turned to the Lord from both the secular and the religious world system, opened his inner being to Him without reservation, presented himself as a living sacrifice, was renewed in the spirit of his mind, and thereby was transformed in his soul through the renewing of his mind. Truly, Paul was qualified to say that he had the mind of Christ, because he was spiritual and had been transformed by having his mind renewed through the saturation of the Spirit.

Only believers who have a strengthened spirit and a renewed mind can know and experience the depths of God—Christ as the wisdom of God in a mystery—as revealed in 1 Corinthians 2. For the accomplishment of the will of God and the fulfillment of the desire of God’s heart, the Lord needs believers who live in the mingled spirit, are renewed in the spirit of the mind, and speak spiritual things in spiritual words taught by the Spirit. **AFC**

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