

manner in which he had consistently introduced the gospel at Corinth” (see 2:1–5).³

To push his point, Paul goes on to note that the Christians “speak the wisdom of God in a mystery” that even the elite of the world cannot fathom because they do not have access to the Spirit, which is necessary for understanding (2:6–14). He ends by assuring the Saints that those who have the Spirit can judge all things while the world is completely incapable of judging them (2:15–16).

PAUL’S PREACHING OF CHRIST TO THE CORINTHIANS (2:1–5)

Greek Text

1 Κάγω ἔλθων πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἦλθον οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ θεοῦ. 2 οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινά τι εἶδέναι ἐν ὑμῖν εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον· 3 κάγω ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῶ ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς, 4 καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ σοφίας ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως, 5 ἵνα ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν μὴ ᾖ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ’ ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ. [SBLGNT]

King James Version

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

New Rendition

1 Now when I myself came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with eloquent speech or wisdom as I proclaimed to you the mystery of God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I appeared before you in weakness and fear and with considerable trepidation, 4 and my speaking and my preaching was not with the persuasiveness of wisdom, but with the convincing proof of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on the power of God.

3. C. Clare Oke, “Paul’s Method Not a Demonstration but an Exhibition of the Spirit,” *Expository Times* 67 (1955): 35–36.

Translation Notes and Comments

2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you / Now when I myself came to you, brothers and sisters: Paul here continues his theme of the previous chapter that God has chosen the weak things of the world to accomplish his purposes (1:28). He uses the emphatic pronoun ἐγώ (*egō*), “I myself,” to stress that, like the Saints at Corinth, he, too, is weak and one that the world considers of little consequence. As already noted above, Paul regularly uses ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*), literally “brothers,” to refer to both male and female members of the Church. Hence our Rendition translates it as “brothers and sisters.”

came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom / I did not come with eloquent speech or wisdom: In the phrase καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας (*kath hyperochēn logou ē sophias*), the noun *hyperochē* literally meant “a natural formation that protrudes,” thus “a projection, or prominence,” but in New Testament Greek it was used figuratively as “a state of excelling, superiority, preeminence.”⁴ Thus the phrase could be translated “with excellence of speech or wisdom.” But the idea behind the phrase is that of excess, going beyond what is required, in other words, showing off.⁵

A hallmark of Greco-Roman teaching and oratory was the use of rhetoric: eloquent, polished, well-reasoned argumentation designed to persuade. Paul emphasizes that he did not follow this practice. Indeed, he deliberately set himself, as a preacher, against those others who made a practice of the art of persuasion.⁶ He would be no part of the competitive showmanship so prevalent in that area that was all about self-promotion.

the testimony of God / the mystery of God: A number of manuscripts have μαρτύριον (*martyrion*), “testimony,” which the KJV follows. Earlier manuscripts, however, suggest that the correct word should be μυστήριον (*mystērion*), “mystery,” and our Rendition follows these.⁷ In 2:7, Paul clarifies what he means by the word “mystery.” The word denoted knowledge unknown before, which God reveals only to a select group of people who were not to share it.⁸ The emphasis is on its property as something revealed,

4. BDAG, 1034.

5. See *hyper* in BDAG, 1031.

6. On the abundance of the rhetoricians and Sophists competing for attention during the Isthmian Games, see Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 8.4.1; Dio Chrysostom, *Virt. (Or. 8)*, 8:9.

7. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 480. For a careful analysis, see Collins, *First Corinthians*, 118.

8. BDAG, 661. In apocalyptic literature of the Jews, *mystery* was associated with the outpouring of revealed knowledge of those salvific events associated with the age to

something too profound to be arrived at through human reason or intellect. Paul's use of the word emphasizes that the Christian gospel comes strictly through revelation from God.⁹

The word *mystērion* also had a strong cultic connotation referring as it did to sacred ceremonies and rites that were part of temple worship among certain Greco-Roman religions. Those initiated into these rites became possessors of special divine knowledge which was to be kept from the uninitiated.¹⁰

2:2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified / For I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified: The phrase οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινα τι εἰδέναι ἐν ὑμῖν (*ou gar ekrina ti eidenai en hymin*) presents some grammatical difficulties in translation. Taken literally it seems to say, "For I did not resolve to know anything among you." This, however, is an example of the privative use of the negative particle οὐ (*ou*), in which "οὐ with the principal verb may be equivalent in sense to μή with a dependent infinitive."¹¹ Thus the correct translation is "I resolved to know nothing among you," as in our Rendition.

The coordinating conjunction γὰρ (*gar*), "for," with which Paul introduced his thought, is explanatory. The Greek text makes it clear that Paul very deliberately chose his method of preaching. Unlike many of the philosophers and teachers in the Greco-Roman world who claimed to have great knowledge of many things to pass on to their students, Paul committed himself only to that which concerned "Christ, and him crucified." Paul's settled policy was to focus exclusively on Jesus Christ and the salvation he brought.¹²

2:3 in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling / in weakness and fear and with considerable trepidation: The noun ἀσθένεια (*astheneia*), "weakness," usually denotes a state of illness but can refer to limitation. Here it expresses Paul's feeling of inadequacy given his great responsibility

come. Among the Christians, it pointed to God's dealings with his people in preparation for his millennial reign. See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 115.

9. BDAG, 662; Louw-Nida, §28.77, compare 53.15.

10. G. Bornkamm, "μυστήριον," in *TDNT*, 4:802-27.

11. Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), §691.

12. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 211. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. declared, "The great mission of this Church is to proclaim Christ and him crucified and his Gospel (1 Cor. 2:2). This should be the message that all Christendom declares." CR, April 1954, 18.

of not only proclaiming the word but also in doing it the correct way.¹³ Therefore, the word should be construed with πρὸς ὑμᾶς (*pros hymas*), meaning “as I was with you,” showing that he expressed this “weakness” as he ministered among them.¹⁴ He further expresses the distress he was under when he arrived by noting the depth of his fear that both he and his message would be rejected.

With these words, Paul contrasts himself with the self-promoting and egotistical Sophists who dominated the rhetorical stage. His words stress the idea that he did not see himself as one of them—crowd pleasing, arrogant show-offs who came and went as the tide. Paul's words also suggest the humble attitude of one who bore great responsibility before God and men to adequately and properly proclaim the word of God to all who would hear.¹⁵

2:4 my speech and my preaching / my speaking and my preaching: Paul's words here denoted the two methods by which he proclaimed God's word. The first was through λόγος (*logos*), “word, speech,” which here likely means private conversations and teachings. The second was through κήρυγμα (*kerygma*), “public declaration.”¹⁶ His words suggest the consistency of his message and his method. His method never varied in public or in private. Though it is true that his words may have lacked the elegance of some orators because he chose not to follow their ways—and this is his point—he did not lack knowledge, and it was his knowledge that counted.¹⁷

enticing words of man's wisdom / the persuasiveness of wisdom: Ancient manuscripts give eleven different readings of this verse. Of the variants, the ones that include the adjective ἀνθρωπίνης (*anthrōpinēs*), “human,” are almost certainly an added gloss. The two variants most likely to be the original are ἐν πειθοῖ σοφίας (*en peithoi sophias*), “by persuasion of wisdom,” and ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγους (*en peithois sophias logos*), “by

13. BDAG, 142.

14. There are two reasons to take this meaning: (1) It follows precisely 16:10, showing Timothy was coming and should not fear while he is “with you,” and (2) 2:1–2 shows what Paul resolved to do on the way, and 2:3 shows how he did during his ongoing visit. See Fee, *First Epistle*, 92.

15. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 213.

16. BDAG, 543. Robertson and Plummer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 32; and Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 54, both suggest that the words simply reflect a hendiadys of terms. It seemed to us that Paul was stressing the idea that his public and private methods and message were the same.

17. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 172–73.

persuasive words of wisdom.”¹⁸ Because the adjective *πειθός* (*peithos*, “persuasive”) appears nowhere else in all of extant Greek literature, the former reading seems to be the best, and is the one chosen by the editors of the SBLGNT. Therefore, our Rendition follows the same reasoning.

Also, the noun *πειθῶ* (*peithō*) does not carry the negative feel that the KJV translation “enticing” suggests. The word simply means “persuasiveness,” and we have so translated it in our Rendition.¹⁹

Again, Paul emphasizes the uniqueness of the method by which he delivered his message. He did not use the rhetorical tricks and cunning devices of the Sophists. It was not through the persuasive or compelling words of the missionary that the message grabbed the people, but by the right of its own power.

but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power / with the convincing proof of the Spirit and of power: The noun *ἀπόδειξις* (*apodeixis*), “demonstration, proof,” carries the idea of the verification or proof that a statement or position is true, thus the word is translated “convincing proof” in our Rendition.²⁰ We have translated the phrase *πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως* (*pneumatōs kai dynamēōs*), “of the Spirit and of power,” as a subjective genitive, thus showing that through the power of the Spirit (as opposed to the preaching of Paul) truth was revealed. Further, in Paul’s writings, he uses the words “Spirit” and “power” almost interchangeably. Therefore, we could have here a hendiadys (“the use of two words . . . to express a single complex idea”²¹), suggesting that Paul’s convincing proof was “the Spirit,” that is, “power,” even the power of God.²² Paul’s point is that what sold his message was not “persuasive words.” Skillful reasoning and argument were not the basis of its success. Rather, the Spirit was the powerful Rhetor with the Apostle being but its spokesman. These people should have known, through their own conversion experience, that the full assurance of what he said came only through the “convincing proof” of the Spirit.²³

2:5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God / so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on the power of God: In the phrase *ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων* (*en sophia*

18. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 481. Though the verse presents some difficulty in translation, the thrust of Paul’s thought is not in doubt.

19. Louw-Nida, §33.304.

20. Louw-Nida, §28.52.

21. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §3025.

22. Fee, *First Epistle*, 95.

23. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 120.

anthrōpōn), literally “in the wisdom of men,” we have translated the preposition ἐν (*en*) as “based on” to best convey the sense of the passage.

In this sentence, Paul explained why he chose the manner in which he proclaimed the gospel message. The Apostle knew that conversion based on intellectual arguments and clever phrases could neither endure persecution and tribulation nor bring salvation. He wanted his converts to have a firm foundation sustained by the revelatory power of the Spirit of God.

Paul shows his readers that God uses the witness of the Spirit to his own ends. It is through that power that Paul makes it possible for the spiritually sensitive to get beyond reason and logic, opinion and belief, argument and rebuttal—those methods used by the uninspired—to find eternal truths. Using the power of the Spirit meant that people came to know that the source of their testimony was not man-made manipulation or emotionalism, but divine confirmation.

Analysis and Summary

Paul begins this chapter by noting that he came to Corinth proclaiming the “mystery of God” (2:1, Rendition). Many of his readers, coming from a pagan background, would have, as Paul intended, tied the word to the rites practiced by certain religions whose initiates were given secret knowledge that pertained to the gods and their work with humankind. Those who received such knowledge were known as οἱ τέλειοι (*hoi teleioi*) “the perfected,”²⁴ and their esoteric knowledge was not to be shared by those outside the religious order.²⁵ Here, in contrast to members of those religions, Paul shows that he presented the Christian mystery openly to all who would hear.

Paul’s method of presentation was very deliberate. In no way was he, through clever words and high-sounding phrases, going to overshadow the message. He understood that the Sophists were more anxious to please their hearers than to present the truth. Not so with Paul. The message was all-important, not the one who delivered it.

Further, he stressed that what some of the Saints found so impressive (“the persuasiveness of wisdom” used by certain men [2:4]), he deliberately avoided. Nonetheless, his method was not without persuasion as their own conversions testified. What it deliberately omitted was the personal appeal and self-aggrandizement of which the methods of the Sophists and

24. BDAG, 995–96.

25. G. Bornkamm, “μυστήριον,” in *TDNT*, 4:802–27.

rhetoricians were so full. Its strength was that it brought understanding for and faith in the Messiah and his Atonement.²⁶

Some scholars have suggested that Paul's less-than-successful experience at Athens, where he had used a more philosophical approach, lent itself to his resolve to back away from that method. Such, however, does not seem to be the case. A careful study of Acts 17:19–34 suggests Paul was moving his message toward his core teaching—"Christ, and him crucified" (2:2)—when he was interrupted over the idea of the Resurrection and conditions inhibited him from returning to his subject. Luke's account gives not the slightest hint that Paul felt disenchanting with his experience at the Areopagus.²⁷ Paul's resolve at Corinth, then, was based not on past experience but on the new condition he faced—men preaching for self-glory and mammon.²⁸

Nonetheless, his approach did bring reproach. As one scholar has noted, certain branch members seemed to have "felt they had the right to judge Paul and his message and were evaluating him by the same criteria by which popular orators and teachers were judged. Paul disputed this right."²⁹ Paul refused to adopt the cajoling and wheedling methods used by most and, particularly, the more aggressive verbal bullying and demagogic tactics used by many.³⁰ His objective was to let truth speak for itself, not to manipulate his audience through clever rhetorical speech or an intimidating display of oratorical power.³¹ Paul's method was grounded in his Jewish background and understanding. Power came from God through seeming weakness (compare Ex. 4:10; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 1:6; see especially Isa. 53). Paul's words made it plain to the Corinthian Saints that the clear and demonstrative "proof" (ἀπόδειξις, *apodeixis*) of the gospel came not in external manifestations of verbal eloquence but only by the power of the Spirit.³² It

26. Fee, *First Epistle*, 94.

27. James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 22.

28. Fee, *First Epistle*, 92.

29. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 47.

30. Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 73.

31. Paul, likely unknowingly, was following the advice of Aristotle, who taught the importance of clear proofs over mere opinions convincingly dressed up as fact. See *Top.* 1.1; 1.4; 1.8; 1.11; *Rhet.* 1.1–3; 1.1.11.

32. James A. Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 78–81.

was on this that their initial faith was born and on this which they must continue to rely.

Though Paul often equates faith with obedience to God's will (see, for example, Rom. 1:5; 16:19), here his use suggests a fervent and heartfelt belief coupled with an intellectual certitude in the salvific powers of the Atonement. In doing so, Paul was not denigrating the total use of persuasion and argument. These do play an important part in getting the message heard (compare 1 Pet. 3:15), but Paul was insisting that there is a higher spiritual means that speaks to both the mind and the heart and, in doing so, creates in the believer a new and more sure reality (compare 1:18; D&C 8:2–3).³³

Part of Paul's willingness to use such humble means was based on his sure sense of his own authority. That authority undergirded his message and gave him that inner confidence that allowed him to proceed as he initially determined. He knew, as one scholar noted, that his authority did not lie in "smooth, competent, impressive, powers of elocution, but in the faithful and sensitive proclaiming rendered operative not by the applause of the audience, but by the activity of God."³⁴ Paul's ways fit comfortably with the Lord's latter-day instruction to his missionaries, "Ye are not sent forth to be taught, but to teach the children of men the things which I have put into your hands by the power of my Spirit; And ye are to be taught from on high" (D&C 43:15–16) and, "if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach" (D&C 42:14). Paul seems to have understood that it was "the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth" (D&C 50:14). Indeed, the Comforter "shall teach them all things that are expedient for them" (D&C 75:10).³⁵ But Paul also seems to have known, too, that "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile" (D&C 121:41–42). Therefore, he relied on his authority but did not use it to bully the people into submission. Instead, he carefully explained himself.

Paul's concluding clause, "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (2:5), states clearly his purpose in both the form his message took and how he delivered it. In modern times, the

33. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 223.

34. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 214, the italics and bold from the original have been removed.

35. See *DNTC*, 2:318–19.

Lord has confirmed the same means, “you shall have power to declare my word in the demonstration of my Holy Spirit” (D&C 99:2). Paul’s methods were meant to disarm the effective force of the worldly wise and influential and bring his listeners to trust in God and Christ alone and completely. That trust, however, was based neither on his words or personality nor on those of anyone else. It was based on the power of the Spirit that came upon them when they heard and exercised faith in the message. Though Paul’s words, “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (2:4), could suggest that he was here referring to signs and, therefore, suggesting that faith rests upon that kind of evidence, such is not that case. For Paul the paradigm is always the same: “Christ, and him crucified,” and the power that comes from that act, namely the transforming of the human soul that brings spiritual insight and conversion (compare Alma 32:21–43).³⁶

THE TRUE WISDOM OF GOD (2:6–8)

Greek Text

6 Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, σοφίαν δὲ οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου οὐδὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων· 7 ἀλλὰ λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ, τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην, ἣν προώρισεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν· 8 ἣν οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἔγνωκεν, εἰ γὰρ ἔγνωσαν, οὐκ ἂν τὸν κύριον τῆς δόξης ἔσταύρωσαν. [SBLGNT]

King James Version

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: 8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

New Rendition

6 However, we do speak wisdom among the spiritually mature, but not the wisdom of this world or of the leaders of this present age who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God’s wisdom which is hidden in a mystery, which God foreordained for our glory before the world was, 8 which none of the leaders of this present age has understood, for if they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

³⁶ Fee, *First Epistle*, 96.