

Spiritual Gifts: Wisdom and Knowledge A Series on Spiritual Gifts: Part 8

The spiritual gift of wisdom and knowledge is presented by Paul as the “word of wisdom” and the “word of knowledge.” It is uncertain if the Greek term “logos” is significant to the meaning of these two spiritual gifts.

For to one is given the word (**logos**) of wisdom (**sophia**) through the Spirit, and to another the word (**logos**) of knowledge (**gnōsis**) according to the same Spirit; (1 Cor 12:8)

Wisdom

Paul speaks of wisdom (Greek noun: sophia) mostly in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians. He introduces his concept of wisdom by challenging conventional wisdom, the wisdom of the world exhibited by the Jews who looked for miraculous signs to locate the Messiah and Greeks who exercised their wisdom in the quest of knowing God. Their failure to know God demonstrated the futility of all human efforts of worldly wisdom.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom (**sophia**) of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom (**sophia**) of the world? For since in the wisdom (**sophia**) of God the world through its wisdom (**sophia**) did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom (**sophia**); but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom (**sophia**) of God. (1 Cor 1:18-24)

With the statement “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), Paul shows that the “wisdom of God” is not based on practical knowledge, but instead is based on the act of Jesus dying on the cross. It is simply faith in Jesus and His work on the cross that grants one the wisdom of God.

An apparent paradox emerges. The very means of knowing God is seen as foolish and rejected by those who are seen as wise and learned; thus, their efforts fail to attain what they are seeking and in reality are futile and foolish.

This understanding of Paul’ meaning of wisdom is consistent with the Old Testament’s view. The Hebrew terms for “fool” and “foolish” describe a person who does not believe in God and is ignorant of wisdom based on God’s moral standard (see the article: What is the Proverbial Fool? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/8Sin/NatureWhatProverbialFool.aspx).

It is important to note that Paul is not rejecting reason and logic. The distinction is that the wisdom of God cannot be gained through human learning and reason; wisdom is given by God as a consequence of becoming a Believer. This also means that no Believer should take pride with this wisdom:

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom (**sophia**) from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor 1:30-31)

The nature of God’s wisdom, according to Paul, enables the Believer to discern the “mysteries of God” (1 Cor 2:5-13). Believers can discern spiritual truths because the indwelling Holy Spirit provides them the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) (see the article “How does the Believer cooperate in sanctification?”).

But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:15-16)

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With a quotation of Isaiah 40:13 (from the Septuagint: "FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?"), Paul's statement of "we have the mind of Christ" implies that Believers can understand spiritual truths in a similar way as Christ knows them.

As the "wise" Jews and Greeks mock, they are unable to judge the message of Paul, who has the "mind of Christ", because, as non-Believers, they lack God's wisdom and are unable to discern the truth (to learn more about the "mysteries of God," see the article: What are Paul's Mysteries of God? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/11Church/TeachPaulMysteriesOfGod.aspx).

For Christians, God's wisdom provides the discernment of understanding God's word so that each can live a life holy before God. For example, unlike non-Believers, Believers can understand Paul and his message (his epistles). In the context of a spiritual gift, the focus includes edifying the church with this wisdom of how to live in a holy manner.

An example can be seen in seen in Solomon (1 Ki 3:5-14; 5:12). While his request for wisdom resulted in judicial shrewdness, Solomon is recorded as the author of Proverbs (Prov 1:1) and Ecclesiastes (Ecc 1:1) both of which are recognized as the best known examples of wisdom literature in the Bible and for the expressed purpose of edifying Believers.

Knowledge

Knowledge was a very important subject to Paul, because he used the Greek noun "gnōsis" some 23 times in his epistles and "epignōskō" 12 times. In the first century, Greek society had many pagan religions that laid claim to divine revelation and knowledge; but Paul makes a distinction between pagan knowledge and a Believer's knowledge of God.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom 1:18-32)

Paul recognizes that knowledge is bound up with Creation and its revelation of the reality of God. The enormity of life, its biodiversity and dependence on astronomical cycles and replenishment through procreation all testified to the existence of God.

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But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God, and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge (**gnōsis**) and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? (Rom 2:17-21)

In speaking of Jews, Paul’s “gnosis,” elaborates that knowledge is not simply theoretical truth; it is knowledge that obligates one to action and obedience.

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge (**gnōsis**) of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (2 Cor 10:5)

In his reference to “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,” Paul indicates that the knowledge of God is based on historical reality and explainable, namely that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who was crucified on the cross. In contrast, pagan religious knowledge is absent of any historical basis and built upon unsubstantiated claims of deity or mysterious and secret knowledge (1 Cor 2:1-2).

Godly knowledge arises from a personal encounter with God and through His Son Jesus Christ who mediates the New Covenant. In similar fashion to godly wisdom, godly knowledge finds its source in the Holy Spirit.

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge (**gnōsis**). Knowledge (**gnōsis**) makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. (1 Cor 8:1-3)

Those who love God have godly knowledge, and God personally knows them. (1 Cor 8:2-3)

True knowledge, as Paul teaches, does not seek pleasure in one’s importance or stature, but rather, finds its basis in God’s love for others. This “gnōsis,” knowledge of God, comes through the acceptance of the gospel and recognizes God’s supremely great gift of forgiveness.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge (**epignōsis**) of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge (**epignōsis**) of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Col 1:9-12)

Godly knowledge finds its expression with the practical behavior of the Believer who lives in a manner that brings credit to God.

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But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge (**gnōsis**) of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. (2 Cor 2:14-17)

For the Believer with the spiritual gift of knowledge, he knows what God desires in the process of sanctification. As a distinction, the Believer with the spiritual gift of wisdom knows how, in the context of one's life, to live a life pleasing to God.

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