

First Epistle to the Corinthians

5 – Essay One: The Cross and Unity – Wisdom through Spirit (1.3)

1 Corinthians 2:3-16

1. Bailey's Outline¹

- a. **A. The Problem: Divisions, Baptism, and the Cross (1:10-16)**
 - i. "I follow ___" is not a valid statement of identity for Christians – it divides
 - ii. "Our Lord Jesus Christ died for us" is the source of Christian community – it unites
 - iii. The cross is God's gift; baptism is the believer's receiving of God's gift
- b. **B. The Wisdom and Power of God: The Cross (1:17-2:2)**
 - i. The cross of Christ is the center of Christian theology
 1. The cross is weakness and foolishness to those who reject it
 2. The cross is power and wisdom to those who believe
 - ii. Paul calls upon his audience to *why* they chose to believe
 - iii. Paul demonstrates ethnic unity through his skilled combining of rhetorical patterns
- c. **B. The Wisdom of God: Revealed Through the Spirit (2:3-16)**
- d. **A. Christian Unity: Paul, Apollos, and Cephas as One (3:1-4:16)**

2. Possible structures of 2:3-16

- a. *ESVSB*
 - i. God's wisdom answers the problem (1:17b-4:21)
 1. The nature of God's wisdom (1:17b-2:16)
- b. *Reading Corinthians*
 - i. Was Paul crucified for you? (1:17-3:4)
 1. Section 1 of 2 (1:17-2:5) – why Paul preached as he did
 - a. (earlier pieces omitted)
 - b. *Prologue* (2:1-2:5)
 2. Section 2 of 2 (2:6-3:4) – what he did *not* teach, how he taught, why he did *not* teach some things
 - a. Paul only able to teach mysteries to the mature (2:6-9)
 - b. The hidden mysteries deal with spiritual gifts (2:10-12)
 - c. Only those who are spiritual can understand this mystery (2:13-14)
 - d. A claim made by the Corinthians that they are spiritual (2:15-16a)
 - e. Paul's response that they are not spiritual and mature (2:16b-3:4)
- c. Bailey²
 - i. God's Wisdom: Hidden and then revealed through the Spirit (2:3-10a)
 - ii. God's Wisdom: Revealed through God, his thoughts, and his Spirit (2:10b-16)

3. Background information

- a. Mediterranean belief that philosophers taught exoteric and esoteric doctrines³
 - i. Exoteric: teaching of the cross
 - ii. Esoteric: Corinthians want to know what Paul is holding back
- b. Mediterranean categories (3) of moral and spiritual progress: beginner, those making progress, the mature or perfect⁴

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*; Kindle ed., location 679

² Bailey, loc. 1120

³ *Reading Corinthians*, OliveTree e-book; commentary on 1:17-3:4

⁴ *Ibid.*

4. 1 Corinthians 2:3-10a

Table 1: From Bailey, loc. 1125

	Intro	A	B	C	D
Paul – fear and trembling – his message – spirit and power	2:3-4 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...,				
Your faith – in the power of God	5 ... so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.				
For the mature – wisdom – this age cannot understand	6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away [<i>who are passing away</i>].				
God’s wisdom – hidden in a mystery		7a But we impart a secret [<i>mystery</i>] and hidden wisdom of God...,			
God decreed – for our glory			7b ... [<i>That</i>] which God decreed before the ages for our glory.		
Not understood by people				8a [<i>That which</i>] None of the rulers of this age understood this...,	
The cross					8b ... for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
Not understood by people				9a [<i>That which</i>] But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined...,	
God prepared – for those who love him			9b ... [<i>That which</i>] what God has prepared for those who love him...”		
God’s wisdom – revealed through the Spirit		10a ... these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (ESV)			

- a. Intro section
 - i. It can credibly function as the end of previous
 - ii. Bailey sees Paul following Isaiah’s prophetic homily rhetorical style (what Bailey terms “high jump format”) where an introductory section (what Bailey terms the “approach”) precedes the main body of the homily
 - iii. As with earlier text, this has been used to justify Christian anti-intellectualism⁵
 - 1. Assumption that in Athens Paul used “the intellectual approach” that failed
 - a. Because he did not start a church there
 - b. So he re-evaluated his strategy and methods for Corinth
 - c. In Corinth then, he ignored any sort of cultural, intellectual, or spiritual heritage of the audience and just preached a straightforward message of Christ and the cross
 - 2. Previous homily resoundingly refutes above assumption
 - 3. Did Paul fail in Athens?
 - a. No. He was *invited* to speak on Mars Hill. That is success.
 - b. Whether or not a church is started is not the measure of success
 - 4. Education and culture of Corinth very different from Athens
 - a. Quoting philosophers and debating Greek style would have meant little in Corinth
 - b. In every place Paul began in a position of weakness
 - c. He did not first attempt to establish a power base
 - d. Fear and trembling refers to an attitude of humility, not a psychological condition
 - e. Paul did not want any kind of resemblance to secular power to influence how his audience would receive the gospel
 - iv. What was Paul’s message?
 - 1. Preaching, but also demonstrations of *charisma* – spiritual gifts
 - a. Intellect and action (*not* emotionalism)
 - 2. The things of this world are passing away – including Rome, the empire, Caesar, the imperial cult, the gods...
 - a. Corinth was filled with reminders of the above
 - b. Paul is very daring and subversive

b. Main body

Table 2: Outline, from Bailey, loc. 1185

1. God’s wisdom: Hidden in mystery
2. that which: God decreed—for us
3. that which: Rulers misunderstood
4. The cross of the Lord of glory
5. that which: no one understood
6. that which: God prepared—for us
7. God’s (wisdom): Revealed through the Spirit

⁵ Bailey, loc. 1136

- i. **Key idea:** Cross appears at the center (again)
- ii. Although the Trinity is never explicitly defined or mentioned as such, Trinitarian thinking is evident: (1), (4), and (7) – God, Christ, Spirit
- iii. God’s initiatives (1), (2), (6), (7): hides, decrees, prepares, reveals
 - 1. (1) and (7) paired; (2) and (6) paired
 - 2. What is the mystery that God hides and reveals?
 - a. The cross of Christ – wisdom that the world cannot understand
 - b. Only the Spirit can enable understanding
 - 3. The cross was not an accident – it was part of God’s eternal plan
 - a. “For our glory”

Behind the Greek word *doxa* (glory) is the Hebrew word *kabod* (weight). In Middle Eastern culture, a “weighty” person (*rajul thaqil*) has to do with wisdom, balance, stability, reliability, sound judgment, patience, impartiality, nobility and the like.

- b. God’s plan, decreed from eternity, is for his people to exhibit these kinds of qualities
 - c. The cross is God’s wisdom and power to enable humans to develop these qualities
 - d. God provides what is needed “for our glory”; we are to respond to his action by responding in love (initiative – response)
- iv. Center section
 - 1. No blame for Christ’s crucifixion – no one understood
 - a. Echo of “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34 (ESV)
 - b. Paul is diplomatic – he does not want to unnecessarily give offense to any party by blaming them or their leaders
 - c. It was part of God’s *mysterious* plan from eternity
 - 2. Scripture quote from Isaiah 52:15, “for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.” (ESV)
 - a. Part of Isaiah’s Servant Song
 - 3. “Lord of glory” – Christ is the example of glory the believers are to develop
- c. Summary of 2:3-10a⁶
 - i. Paul is sensitive to his audience. He adapts his methods as necessary, but his approach is always in weakness, not with worldly power.
 - ii. God hides, decrees, prepares and then reveals the mystery of the cross. It is an eternal plan.
 - iii. Paul is thinking in Trinitarian terms.
 - iv. The intended outcome of the cross is transformation of believers.
 - v. Paul does not blame human agencies for the crucifixion. They did not understand.
 - vi. Paul has Isaiah’s Suffering Servant as the background for this section of this letter.

⁶ Bailey, loc. 1242

5. 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16

Table 3: From Bailey, loc. 1256

	A	B	C
(1)	a) Spirit / deep things of God b) Parable of b) Man / thoughts / Spirit a) God / thoughts / Spirit	2:10b-11 For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths [<i>deep things</i>] of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.	
(2)	a) We receive b) Spirit from God c) We understand things from God d) Given by God		¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things [<i>from God</i>] freely given us by God. [<i>graced upon us</i>]
(3)	We impart – teachings of Spirit – to spiritual people		¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by [<i>teachings of</i>] human wisdom but taught by [<i>teachings of</i>] the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.
(4)	a) Natural person – not receive b) Gifts of the spirit c) He cannot understand d) They are spiritually discerned		¹⁴ The natural person does not accept [<i>receive</i>] the things of the Spirit of God, 'for they are folly to him', and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
(5)	a) Spiritual one – discerns all b) Scripture related to b) Mind of the Lord a) Mind of Christ	¹⁵⁻¹⁶ The spiritual person [<i>Spiritual One</i>] judges [<i>discerns</i>] all things, but is himself to be judged [to be discerned] by no one. "For who has understood [<i>known</i>] the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (ESV)	

- a. Structure
 - i. Ring composition of five subsections
 - ii. Parable and scripture quotation (part of prophetic rhetoric pattern) found
 - 1. In A-B-A pattern
 - iii. (2) and (4) sections parallel each other as four sequential lines
 - iv. Climax in the center
- b. Sections (1) and (5)
 - i. Section (1) begins with “For the Spirit” – Section (5) begins with...?
 - 1. Is it “spiritual person” or “Spiritual One” (i.e., the Holy Spirit)?
 - 2. Linear reading might favor former; ring composition favors latter
 - a. Linear reading contrasts “natural person” of v.14 to “spiritual person” of v.15
 - b. Ring composition sees the parallelism as providing weight to Spirit
 - ii. “Deep things” – derived from Gnostic thought – connection to Paul’s readers
 - 1. Gnostics – mysteries reserved for the faithful few
 - 2. Christians – mysteries revealed to all
 - 3. “Deep things” = “mysteries” = the cross of Christ
 - 4. Paul implies Trinitarian thought: Spirit searches; deep things of God; which is Christ
 - iii. Parable of the man, his thoughts, and his spirit
 - 1. “First Christian parable on the Trinity”⁷
 - 2. Facts about a person, how and what a person thinks, and the “spirit” that energizes a person
 - a. They are each distinct from one another, together they describe the whole person
 - b. Knowing one piece won’t give the whole picture, but it can reveal something about the whole person
 - 3. The same is true about God (the Trinity)
 - iv. Question: How can we know God?
 - 1. (5) says no one can know the nature of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Though we can see and experience the work/effects of the Spirit
 - 2. Scripture quote from Isaiah 40:13 (LXX) – God’s (the Father’s) mind is unavailable to humans
 - 3. Good news: “We have the mind of Christ”
 - a. We have been given a way to know God through Christ
 - b. Through Christ we can know the “deep things”, the *mystery* of God
- c. Sections (2) and (4)
 - i. Trinitarian framework helps with interpretation
 - ii. God and Spirit are clearly present in each (2) and (4)
 - 1. “Things from God”: implies cross of Christ and the power and wisdom through it
 - iii. “For they are folly to him” has no balancing line – parenthetical – ties to *hymn of the cross* of 1:17-2:2
 - iv. (4) contrasts (2)
 - 1. We vs. natural person / receive vs. not receive / the Spirit
 - 2. Understand vs. not understand / given (graced) and discerned (accepted)

⁷ Bailey, loc. 1277

Logic and reasoning are not enough. There is a component in the gift of grace that equips the believer to understand the things of God. Paul moves in a world that cannot be reconciled to the worldview of the Enlightenment.⁸

- d. Center (3)
 - i. God gives “deep things” and we receive them, so that we can turn around and impart them to others
 - ii. Human wisdom: power structures of the world
 - iii. Spiritual truths: power and wisdom of the cross
- e. Summary of 2:10b-16⁹
 - i. Importance of Trinitarian thought – mentioned six times
 - 1. Demonstration and source of Christian unity
 - ii. Reason (alone) insufficient to grasp teachings of the Spirit
 - iii. Spirit (alone) insufficient to know God – must have the mind of Christ
 - 1. Corinthians were obsessed with the Spirit and her manifestations
 - iv. Grace is given (a gift), but it must be received (spiritually discerned)
 - v. The mystery of the Trinity and the cross are folly to the natural person
 - 1. Reiterating themes from the *hymn of the cross*
 - vi. The life purpose of the believer is to receive, understand, and then impart the mysteries of God

Next: Return to the problem of divisions and how to bring unity – Part 1 of 2
Archives at <http://corinthianessays.blogspot.com/>

⁸ Bailey, loc. 1323

⁹ Bailey, loc. 1335