

Lived experiences of the 'Wisdom of God' according to 1 Corinthians 2



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This article investigates the theological concept *Wisdom of God*, which could appear vague to many Christians. Paul refers 17 times to the concept *wisdom* in the first epistle to the Corinthians. The first four chapters include 16 references to wisdom, and then again in 12:8, where Paul uses it with reference to a spiritual gift. The nine occurrences of wisdom in chapter one exposes a dialectical approach in which the 'Wisdom of God' is opposed to the 'wisdom of the world'. In the second chapter Paul compares the content and character of these two types of wisdom. This article predominantly focuses on chapter 2 by pursuing different perspectives for the concept of the *wisdom of God*. The investigation starts with a brief overview of the Corinthian circumstances to contextualise the reasoning of the research, followed by a discourse analysis of the Greek text to determine corresponding semantic networks. These networks provide headings for the research. Thirdly, Paul is assessed as protagonist of, and intermediary for, communicating this wisdom. Fourthly, the focus falls on the reception of the 'wisdom of God'. Fifthly, the article outlines the 'role' and 'function' of the Spirit in the revelation of the 'wisdom of God'. Sixthly, the focus is on how wisdom is received. Finally, the research examines features used by Paul to communicate the 'wisdom of God' as lived experiences.

Contribution: The concept, activity, and lived experience of the 'wisdom of God', is understood to be the epistemology to Christian existence, living and experience of God. This article investigates and highlights the 'presence of God' living in Christ as righteousness, redemption, and holiness (sanctification).

Keywords: Corinthian circumstances; Paul; wisdom of God; Holy Spirit; mind of Christ; lived experiences.

Introduction

The escalating global interest regarding spirituality in the Christian environment, both academically and ecclesiastically, deemed me to approach my research about *the wisdom of God* from a *Christian spirituality* (lived experiences) perspective. There are a variety of definitions for 'spirituality'. This research opts for a working definition of *Christian spirituality* which combine those of Waaijman (2002:312), Sheldrake (2000:40), McGrath (1999:1–2), Perrin (2007:31), and Schneiders (2000:254). Hence, 'spirituality' refers here to 'living a life of transformation and self-transcendence that resonates with the lived experience of the divine'. This delineation entails two significant processes: 'a lived experience of the divine-human relationship' and 'living a life of transformation and self-transcendence that resonates with that of the divine-human relationship' (Van der Merwe 2014:373).¹

The *modus operandi* for investigating 'the spirituality of the wisdom of God' starts with a brief overview of the Corinthian circumstances to contextualise the reasoning of the research. This is followed by a discourse analysis of the Greek text to determine corresponding semantic networks. These networks provide headings for the research. Thirdly, Paul is assessed as protagonist of and intermediary for communicating this wisdom. Fourthly, Paul introduces the Corinthians to the only wisdom that matters, namely the divine wisdom of the cross. Fifthly, the role and function of the Spirit of God is outlined in the disclosure of the 'wisdom of God'. Sixthly, the focus falls on the reception of the 'wisdom of God'. Finally, the research examines features used by Paul to communicate the 'wisdom of God' as lived experiences.

1. Kim (2017:34–36) expresses spirituality significantly as 'fundamentally *anthropological*, particularly *experiential*, and indispensably *theological*'.

Note: Special Collection - Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of God's wisdom.

The historical context of 1 Corinthians

Internal rivalries

Chapters 1–4 in 1 Corinthians should be deemed as the first division of the letter (Thiselton 2011:107). In these chapters, Paul reviews the anomalies of ‘factionalism or internal rivalries’ in this congregation.² These problems emerge and are central as the letter progresses. Already in 1 Corinthians³ 1:10–17, Paul introduces these problems and accuses this community in Corinth of divisions (*σχίσματα*) (1:10). Paul had received an oral account of these divisions among the people of Corinth from the followers of Chloe (*ὕπὸ τῶν Χλόης*) (1:11). It is also possible that the news regarding divisions could have been communicated to Paul via the letter referred to in 7:1 (Van der Merwe 2013:110).

These internal rivalries progressed through dignitaries who had direct influence on the congregation (cf. Snyman 2009:131–132). Paul addresses this issue by not supporting any one leader over another. On the contrary, he endeavoured to alert the community of the certainty of factions and that they must accept that reality. In managing this situation, he motivates them to be cognisant of ‘the joint sharing of their position of *being in Christ*’ (Thiselton 2011:107). They are in common-union⁴ (*κοινωνία*) (1:9) with Christ.

Worldly wisdom

The prologue of this letter is succeeded by the exposition of Paul vis-à-vis the divergence ‘between human and divine wisdom’ (1:18–2:16), a problem relating specifically to this dispute. The intention of Paul was to deal with this issue of division as being symptomatic of a solemn and advanced problem. It was nothing else than the attraction of the Corinthians to ‘wisdom of the wise’ (1:19); ‘the wisdom of this age’ (2:6); and ‘human wisdom’ (2:5, 13). It is *the language of worldly wisdom*. Perhaps particular adherents in this church deemed themselves sagacious, and as a result deemed themselves to be ‘spiritual people’ (3:1). Consequently, according to 2:1–5, this could have affected a denunciation of Paul’s rationalisation of the gospel (Snyman 2009:131).

In his addressing of the tensed situation of *faction* and *wisdom* in the Corinthian church, Paul is convinced that only the Spirit of God can unite them (cf. chapter 12). Only the presence of the Spirit of God can expel internal conflicts, for only the Spirit of God can reveal the wisdom of God (2:10–12). With this confidence in mind, Paul neglects discussing any idea of any group in the Corinthian church (Van der Merwe 2013:111).

2. Compare Garland (2003:37–39) about the diverse interpretations regarding the nature of this conflict.

3. All references to 1 Corinthians will further be indicated only with chapter and verse numbers.

4. Therefore, the interpretation of ‘fellowship’ as ‘common-union’.

The fundamental dispute in the Corinthian church for Paul is, ‘what does it mean to be *πνευματικός*?’ The church members were convinced that their interest in *wisdom* (*σοφία*) and *knowledge* (*γνώσις, γνώσκω*) endowed them with *superior* wisdom and knowledge, resulting in boasting and false confidence. Paul addresses this in chapter 2. He prompts these members through his readers to consent to his rationalisation of his proclamation (2:1–2), to discern the wisdom of God and consequently, possess the mind of Christ. This is to be ‘spiritual’ (*πνευματικός*) (Van der Merwe 2013:112).

A discourse analysis of 1 Corinthians 2 will now be conducted to determine various related semantic networks to facilitate the reasoning for understanding and experiencing the ‘wisdom of God’.

Discourse analysis and semantic networks

Discourse analysis: 1 Corinthians 2:1–16

A complete layout of the discourse analysis for 1 Corinthians 2:1–16 is set out in Figure 1 of this article (p. 3).

Semantic networks

The following demarcated semantic networks are proposed as relevant and essential to the topic of this research as depicted in Figure 1:

- Paul the intermediary to receive and to interpret the wisdom of God.
- The wisdom of God.
- The role of the Spirit of God.
- Reception of the wisdom of God.
- Lived experiences of the wisdom of God.

Paul the intermediary to receive and to interpret the wisdom of God (network A)

Paul appointed by God as apostle according to the will of God (1:1)

Paul identifies himself as ‘an apostle⁵ of Jesus Christ by the will of God’ (cf. also 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tm 1:1). Paul understands this to mean that he is not bound to a single church but to universally proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is only the will of God which determines the vocation and life of Paul. Only God can judge (*ἀνακρίνω*) (4:3) his stewardship (*οικονόμος*) (4:2; ed. Danker 2000:698). His writing is far from providing assertions but rather to ‘speak ... to sensible people’ (10:15). For Thiselton (2000):

Paul sees his apostleship not as an instrument of power but as a call to become a transparent agent through whom the crucified and raised Christ becomes portrayed through a lifestyle, thought, and utterance. (p. 45; also cf. Garland 2003:24–25)

5. Paul describes himself as *ἀπόστολος* (1:1) and thus as somebody who has been sent by Christ Jesus. Being sent also means that somebody has a mandate’ (Koet 2018:77).

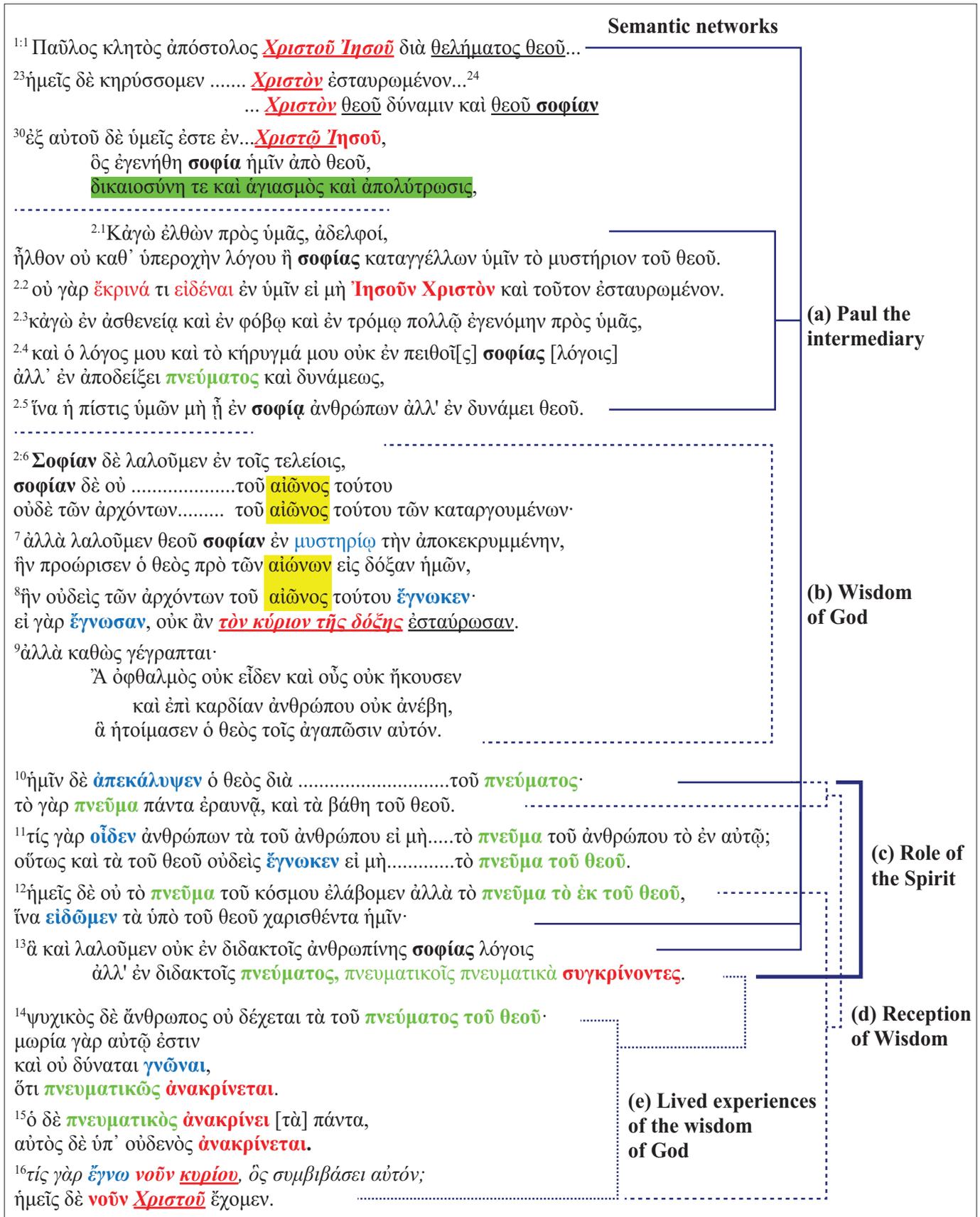


FIGURE 1: Discourse analysis and semantic networks.

Paul and the Spirit

In chapter 1, Paul criticises the Corinthians with indirect reference to Apollos. According to Brookins (2020:140) 'they vowed allegiance to Apollos, they espoused the "wisdom" of Apollos, they "boasted" in Apollos, and after having evaluated Paul and Apollos, they decided in favour of Apollos'.⁶ Then in chapter 2:1–5 (a prologue for 2:6–16), Paul elaborates on his own preaching. His rhetoric was hortatory (Brookins 2020:141). He evokes the point of the malfunction of human wisdom (1:17). If he had shared the gospel with sophistication and his reasoning instead of the Spirit of God, he possibly could have persuaded the Corinthians. In this pericope, however, Paul describes how he endeavours to avoid human wisdom and sophistication when he communicates with them.

Firstly, Paul's 'proclamation was not with plausible words of wisdom' (2:4a), but he preached only 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (2:2):

I did not come proclaiming to you in lofty words or wisdom ... (2:1). For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ ... (2:2). My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom (2:4a).

This was because the Corinthians 'embody a wisdom antithetical to the wisdom of the cross' (Brookins 2020:141).

These references prove Paul's concentration and focus are only on Jesus when preaching to the Corinthians.⁷ This is evident from the culmination of chapter 2 in verse 16 ('οὐν Χριστοῦ'). This is why he bypassed 'lofty words' (2:1) and 'plausible words' (2:4) of wisdom. His option was deliberately founded on his judgement and perception of both the gospel and the tense situation in the congregation. In the first two chapters, four similar phrases include the nouns σοφία and λόγος. Brookins (2020:144) correctly interprets these inclusions to be consistently 'interpreted as references to rhetoric' of Paul.

Secondly, Paul describes his visit to them as, 'I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling' (2:3). 'Stripped of self-reliance', Paul had to count on the involvement of God to work effectively and powerfully through him. With this kind of behaviour, Paul identifies his 'weakness, fear, and trembling' (2:3) with Christ's 'humiliation' (Brookins 2020:147).

Thirdly, Paul avoids 'plausible words of wisdom' to endorse 'the demonstration of the Spirit and power of God' (2:4). The intention of Paul's style and content of preaching was to ground the faith of the Corinthian congregation in the power of God and not in human wisdom, because God's wisdom is

6.Cardona (2022:283) points out that it seems as if Paul describes 'four fronts when talking about the Corinthian factionalism in 1:12 (Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ)'. His four references to Apollos, (3:4, 5, 6, 22; 4:6), perhaps allude to the church rather honouring his rhetorical skills. Frestadius (2011:55) appeals for considering Acts 18:24, 28 as fundamental texts for the interpretation of the historical circumstances in 1:17–3:23.

7.Cardona (2022:272) regarded the divine knowledge imparted by Paul in 1:18–2:16 as 'the foundation of his own knowledge'.

unobtainable from human wisdom. As πνευματικοί, they will experience God's wisdom by way of the power of the Spirit. In this way Paul replaces worldly or Apollos's rhetoric with his own rhetoric.

In conclusion, Paul's intention was to emphasise his human weaknesses to both abolish the wisdom claims of the Corinthians and to underline the function and powerful engagement of the Spirit in proclaiming God's wisdom (2:1). Paul trusted the Spirit of God to persuade the congregation to realise that faith cannot be founded on the wisdom of people. Therefore, Paul contends that his fundamental objective was to convince the congregation that they need a different and fresh foundation, 'that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God' (2:5).

The wisdom of God (network B)

Features of the wisdom of God

In his lengthy argument about wisdom (1:18 ff), Paul defines his perception of 'wisdom' which characterises the groups (divisions) in Corinth. He does not even define the wisdom content for those who are mature⁸ – referred to in 2:6 ff. This was not part of his objective: It would misdirect his whole contention. His intention was to introduce the Corinthians to the only wisdom that matters, namely the divine wisdom of the cross (2:7), which was revealed through the Spirit of God (2:10–12). This comprises the following:

Firstly, that the quintessence of the message of Paul in the first four chapters is a mystery devised by God himself. Paul refers in 2:7 to this wisdom of God as 'mystery' (ἐμυστηρίῳ) until God unveiled it to him. All Paul's references to mystery in the *corpus Paulinum* is not something mysterious or the incomprehensibility of any truth. Instead, for Kaiser (1981:312), this mystery refers to a reality and information which is indiscernible by human understanding but perceptible to the emissaries of God after divine declaration and revelation.

Paul asserts to communicate 'the wisdom of God' as 'a mystery' (μυστηρίῳ) in 2:7. It is now revealed in the enigmatic irrationality of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (2:1–2). This Jesus is the very epitome of the wisdom (σοφία) of God (1:24, 30). This Christ, crucified, personifies now 'the power and wisdom of God', which then muddles human wisdom (1:18–25). Thus, it is a mystery, a divine truth, 'perceived by some but still veiled for others' (Lang 2016:89). Paul is hereby declaring that God's wisdom, the crucified Christ, came as a 'mystery'. Paul's rescue, however, towards participating in the 'mystery' is that he communicates the spiritual gifts of God 'in words taught by the Spirit' (2:13).

Secondly, another distinction of wisdom is that it was 'concealed' (τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην) (2:7). God was content to keep this wisdom silent for ages before God disclosed it (cf. Kaiser 1981:312). God revealed it when the time was

8.The adjective, τέλειος [mature] (2:6), corresponds with the adjective νήπιος [immature] (3:1). As a pair, they correspond with the pair πνευματικός-ψυχικός [spiritual-unspiritual] (cf. Brookins 2020:148).

appropriate (cf. Rm 16:25). All this then reflects on the mystery of that wisdom.

Thirdly, God already 'foreordained' (προώρισεν) (2:7) this wisdom 'before the ages' ('πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων'). Paul is thereby emphasising that God had already planned the announcement of this wisdom, to lead people from darkness to light, salvation, and glory ('εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν') (2:7; Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:81).

Fourthly, 'None of the rulers of this age understood this [wisdom of God]' (2:8). Their lack of awareness of this wisdom caused them to 'have crucified the Lord of glory'. This was because divine wisdom is greater than the thought of individuals or all human thought, such that '[n]one of the rulers of this age understood this' (2:12).⁹

In *three additional interrelated phrases*, Paul maintains his description of this wisdom. *It did not derive from 'empirical sources', 'traditional knowledge' in the church, or even 'intuitive insight or imagination'*. As a result, this wisdom must exclusively originate from God. Paul's claim here is therefore obvious: '... these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit' (2:10).

An *eighth* distinction is that God's wisdom differs from human wisdom in two ways: (1) Neither the natural man nor the 'rulers of this age' (2:8) can comprehend this wisdom, for it is 'hidden' (2:13 ff.; cf. 1:21); and (2) it involves 'wisdom among the mature'. This assumes, according to 3:1–3, not merely perception but additionally a mind, renewed by the Spirit to 'discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rm 12:2). This then necessitates both perception as well as a mature mind, that is, a mind renewed by the Spirit. Prior to that mature mind, the Corinthians will remain 'people of the flesh ... infants in Christ ... not ready for solid food' (3:1–13).

Lastly, this divine wisdom involves the salvation plan of God, 'which God decreed before the ages for our glory' (2:7) and the 'things' (2:10) 'God has prepared for those who love him' (2:9). It was 'taught (διδασκτοῖς) by the Spirit, interpreting (συγκρίνοντες) spiritual things (πνευματικὰ) to those who are spiritual (πνευματικοίς)' (2:13), 'so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God' (2:12; Van der Merwe 2012:172–174).

Essence or content of the wisdom of God

The notion of *wisdom* occurs 17 times throughout 1 Corinthians. Sixteen of these occurrences appear in the first four chapters. A single reference appears in 12:8. Even here it refers to a spiritual gift. In chapter 1, it appears nine times in a dialectic sense to oppose worldly wisdom with divine wisdom. In chapter 2, Paul expounds the nature

⁹Cardona (2022:274) provides a valuable link between *knowledge* and *wisdom*. According to him epistemology concerns 'what is knowledge?' A similar expression is 'what do people know?' Paul's decisive answer in the Corinthian context is 'the cross, Christ crucified'. For Paul to arrive at such a statement, 'he contrasts the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God, thus creating a paradox of divine knowledge that is comprehended only by those who renew their minds (2:14)'.

and content of the divine wisdom, also contrasting it to worldly wisdom. Paul verifies his claim by discussing the *wisdom* concept in these two chapters from various perspectives:

The incomprehensibility of the world

Cousar (1990:171) deduces the 'content of the divine wisdom' as fundamental for the discernment of this wisdom. According to 2:8, '[t]he rulers of this age' exhibited their obliviousness to the wisdom of God when they 'have crucified the Lord of glory'. In this way, Paul establishes the link between divine wisdom and 'Christ crucified' (1:23–24). Paul is arguing that God's wisdom is nothing other than the proclamation of the cross (1:23–24). Paul refers to this wisdom to be rejected by both Jews and Gentiles as being a 'stumbling block' and 'foolishness' (1:23).

Conversely, the πνευματικοίς [spiritual people] (2:13), who can grasp this wisdom, are referred to as 'those who are called', that is, those for whom Christ is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1:24; cf. Rhyne 1990:175).

Antithetical statements

A succession of antithetical statements appears in the first two chapters. Paul opposes 'the wisdom of the world' ('τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου') with 'the wisdom of God' ('τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ θεοῦ') (1:20–21). The limitation that 'the world did not know God through wisdom' negates and prevents the world from knowing God (1:21, 22), and consequently disables any dialogue with God. Alternatively, Paul asserts that the *kerugma* of 'Christ crucified' (1:23), reasonably imprudent according to the world, turns out to be the means through which God validates the world's wisdom to be fallacious (Cousar 1990:170). He nails them, proclaiming that, '... the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (2:18). Paul, then explains this dualism of the cross in the subsequent verses. He elaborates on the 'foolishness' (μωρία) in 1:19–2:5 and the 'wise' (σοφός) in 2:6–3:23 (Mitchell 1991:87).

The crucified Christ

Paul explains in 2:1–5 that he is indomitable to 'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ', that is Christ crucified (2:2; cf. Polhill 1983:331; see also Schnelle 2005:202 ff.). He regards the crucifixion to be the power of God for redemption (Pratt 2000:25). Baird (1959:425–432) already indicated a few years earlier that Paul already asserts that this wisdom implicates more than referring only to the crucifixion and the death of Christ. Baird believes Paul's reference 'to know nothing but Christ and him crucified' (2:2) involves understanding the entire rationale about the creation and salvation of God. God reveals his wisdom when Christ is proclaimed as the crucified, for then he becomes the 'revelation and consummation' of the all-inclusive realisation of the redemption of God (Baird 1959:431–432; Van der Merwe 2012:175).

Naselli (2018:109) defines in a single sentence Paul's understanding of the gospel in 1 Corinthians: 'Jesus lived, died, and rose again for sinners, and God will save you if you turn from your sins and trust Jesus'.

The Spirit of God and the wisdom of God (network E)

The affinity and relationship of the Spirit of God

For Paul, the Spirit of God (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ) (2:11; see also 10, 14) acts as a mediator of the revelation of the wisdom of God. Therefore, Frestadius (2011:70) aptly states that 'An appropriate epistemological starting point for those seeking divine wisdom would be acknowledging natural limitations, resulting in humble dependence on God's Spirit'. The Spirit shares in the divine attribute of omniscience and constitutes the divine council between the Father and the Son. Nothing is concealed from God's Spirit because the Spirit 'searches everything, even the depths of God' ('γὰρ πνεῦμα πάντα ἐραυνᾷ, καὶ τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ') (2:10; Pratt 2000:36). Only the Spirit comprehends what God really is. To verify his declaration, Paul assesses the human spirit with the divine Spirit (2:11). For Paul the thoughts of any person remain concealed from another person. Similarly, this is true of God's Spirit: Only the Spirit knows the 'depths of God', what and who God really is.

The intermediary character of the Spirit

Paul illuminates the all-inclusive function of the Spirit during the 'revelation' of the wisdom of God in 2:10–16. According to this context, the Spirit commences 'both the giving and receiving of revelation':

- 'these things [*wisdom of God*] God has revealed to us through the Spirit' (2:10)
- 'Hence the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God' (2:10)
- assists believers 'so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God' (2:12)
- bestows gifts on believers – 'receive the gifts of God's Spirit' (2:12, 14)
- 'that we may understand the gifts' (2:12)
- teaches believers ('ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ πνεύματος', 2:13)
- 'interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual' (2:13)
- 'But we have the mind of Christ' (2:16).

Paul could teach and 'proclaim[ing] the mystery of God' (2:1) solely through the Spirit. Only 'those who are spiritual (enlightened by the Spirit) discern all things' (2:13). This communication came through the teaching by the Spirit in words 'interpreting spiritual things (πνευματικῶς) to those who are spiritual (πνευματικοῦς)' (2:13). All this boils down to the point that only those who are under the influence of the Spirit can accommodate spiritual teaching.

The Spirit certainly supersedes human reason in attempting to comprehend God (Cardona 2022:281). Human beings

cannot understand or know the mind of God by using human wisdom. Hence, only the Spirit can disclose 'secret and hidden' wisdom to the spiritual man (πνευματικῶς) (2:13; Pratt 2000:36; also see Schlier 1979:517). The Spirit, firstly makes the profound perception of the wisdom of God conceivable and discernible for those who are spiritual (2:10; Delling 1978:657). In 2:10, Paul explains the viability of this by the Spirit in reference to the verb ἐραυνᾷ [*searches*] to define the activity of meticulous investigation by the Spirit: it 'searches everything' (πάντα) (2:10); 'all things' (2:15), including 'even the depths (βάθη) of God' (Gaffin 1991:157 ff), for the sake of revealing them (Schrage 1991:257 ff.).

Reception and comprehensibility of the wisdom of God (network D)

During the era of the early church, the Spirit communicated God's wisdom to Paul. At that point in time, Paul was already spiritual (πνευματικός). *Divine knowledge* must be communicated, and the most suitable way was via 'revelation, teaching, interpretation and understanding' (cf. Cardona 2022:282). The reception and discernment of this divine wisdom generated a 'lived experience of a transformative existential encounter' within Paul. 'Those who are spiritual' (2:15) in Corinth would have had similar incidents when Paul shared the divine wisdom with them.¹⁰ Today, the Spirit continues to reveal divine wisdom to spiritual people but now through 'imaginative exegeses'. Their interpretation of divine wisdom would consequently create lived experiences of 'transformative existential encounters' in their lives. Furthermore, in the 21st century, the exegesis of biblical texts should also illuminate the 'revelation, teaching, interpretation and understanding' of the constantly expounding wisdom of God¹¹ as lived experiences.

Paul describes the revelation and reception of wisdom from several communication *perspectives* which complement one another in the milieu of lived experiences¹²:

- '... these things God has revealed (ἀπεκάλυψεν) to us through the Spirit ...' (2:10)
- '... taught (διδασκίται) by the Spirit ...' (2:13)
- '... interpreting (συγκρίνοντες) spiritual things ...' (2:13)
- '... may understand (οἶδα) the gifts bestowed on us by God' (2:12)
- '... to understand (γινῶναι) them because they are spiritually discerned (ἀνακρίνεται)' (v 14).

10. Sweatman (2015:226) refers to the *natural* and *spiritual* as 'competing modes of discernment'.

11. Brümmer (2008:149 ff.) defines 'religious experience' as '... ordinary experience (including ordinary sense perception) looked upon with the eyes of faith'. Then 'religious experience' becomes 'hermeneutical' in the sense that it entails an interpretation of our ordinary experience.

12. Cardona (2022) excellently summarises Paul's communication perspectives:

Beside the nouns λόγος and κήρυγμα, Paul also uses the verbs κηρύσσει, 'to proclaim/preach' and λαλέω, 'to speak' to point out the importance of the spoken word. In contrast to the Corinthians, Paul says 'we preach (κηρύσσομεν) Christ crucified (1:23); λαλοῦμεν, 'we speak wisdom, but not worldly wisdom' (2:6); 'we speak (λαλοῦμεν) God's wisdom in a mystery' (2:7); and λαλοῦμεν, 'we speak' words thought by the Spirit (2:13). Paul's use of language indicates that the oral communication of God's wisdom also matters. (pp. 284–285)

The *first lived experience* (ἀπεκάλυψεν) relates to ‘revelation’. The *second lived experience*, (διδάκτος), relates to ‘teaching (inspiration)’. The *third lived experience*, (συγκρίνοντες) relates to ‘discernment’. The *fourth lived experience* (οἶδα and γνῶναι) relates to the understanding of divine wisdom to express the ‘illumination of Scripture’. Although Paul used a variety of verbs, semantically they relate to ascertain ‘comprehension’ and ‘lived experiences’. Even the verbal succession of these verbs demonstrates logical advancement in the progression of discernment and experiences: reveal – teach – interpret – understand (Van der Merwe 2013:126).

Reception of wisdom

The revelation (ἀπεκάλυψεν) of God’s wisdom (2:10–12)

In three ways Paul articulates the ‘knowledge’ the Spirit communicated to Christian believers: ‘the depths of God’ (2:10), ‘the thoughts of God’ (2:11), and ‘the gifts bestowed on us by God’ (2:12). Paul’s usage of the verb ‘he revealed’ (ἀπεκάλυψεν, aorist) in 2:10 refers to a specific point in time in the past when the wisdom of God was revealed to him (Kaiser 1981:314). He relates this revelation by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10–12) with the exposure of the ‘deep things of God’ (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) which refers to the detailed plan and strategy of God’s salvation (cf. Kaiser 1981:314). That plan is a continuous ‘intra-Divine activity’ for Paul because he uses the verb ἐραυνᾷ [searching] in the present tense.

The teaching (inspiration) of God’s wisdom (2:13)

Paul (and other apostles) did not communicate a conventional message. His message was not human innovation; contrarily, Paul was ‘taught (διδάκτος) by the Spirit’. The revelation via the Spirit was exceptional and undiscernible or uncommunicable for ordinary requirements. For Paul ‘only the “mature” who love God and who receive the Spirit (2:12) can recognise it as divine wisdom’ (Garland 2003:99). Humans, on their own, cannot resolve the mystery for themselves; it can only be conceded by God to ‘those who love’ God (2:9; cf. also Cardona 2022:280). They are ‘taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words’ (2:13).

Therefore, Kaiser (1981:314 ff.) refers to this verse (2:13) as undoubtedly the most defined declaration ‘on the mode of inspiration’. It denotes union and the mode by which God’s Spirit and Paul interacted to communicate these ‘deep things of God’ – the Spirit as ‘intermediary’ and Paul’s preaching as the ‘method’.

The comprehensibility of the wisdom

The interpretation of the wisdom of God (συγκρίνοντες) (2:13; cf. also 2:2, 14, 15)

Paul is preaching a controversial gospel under the influence, guidance, and experience of the Spirit to expose ‘that which is not wisdom’. On the one side, it ‘embarrasses’ one group and on the other side it ‘glorifies’ another group. This theme

recurs throughout the letter as early as 1:18. Fundamentally for Christians, it is to recognise themselves as ‘spiritual people’ (πνευματικοί),¹³ having the Spirit to assist them *interpreting* (συγκρίνοντες)¹⁴ whether things are ‘spiritual’ or not – of the Spirit or not.

The gender of the adjective πνευματικοί, can be interpreted as either masculine or neuter. Both are applicable here. Therefore, it can be *interpreted* as ‘spiritual truths (πνευματικὰ) come through spiritual expressions taught by the Spirit who expresses these spiritual truths to spiritual people’ (cf. 2:13). Subsequently, what is *interpreted* as ‘spiritual’ is always Christ-centred. This argues that ‘Christ crucified’ is *interpreted* as a message that is understood by people who are ‘spiritual’, denoting those who possess the Spirit. Consequently, this will empower spiritual people to articulate with Paul – ‘We have the mind of Christ’ (2:16; Gardner 2018:n.p.).

The illumination of Scripture (2:14–16)

The concluding three verses of chapter 2, clearly distinguish the work of the divine Spirit. In 2:14, Paul states that the *unspiritual person* (ψυχικός δὲ ἄνθρωπος)¹⁵ does ‘not receive (οὐ δέχεται)¹⁶ the gifts (τὰ) of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them’. The verb γινώσκω does not refer to the identification of gifts but the acceptance of gifts as they are. Hence, the natural man will not accept the truths uncovered, for they must be ‘discerned’ (ἀνακρίνω). This assumes that these truths (wisdom) are to be examined and found to have a definite value for those who are assisted and illumined by the Spirit of God.

True discernment is one of the faculties of the Spirit – to aid those who are spiritual (πνευματικὰ) ‘to apply, to see the value, worth, and significance of a text for his own person, situation, and times’ (Kaiser 1981:318). Knowing and experiencing God, encompasses not only an intellectual exercise where the Spirit attunes a person’s mind to be more aware to divine phenomena than previously used to be. It also necessitates the acute awareness and ‘lived experience’ that they live graciously every day (cf. Cousar 1990:173). Brümmer (2008:152) opines that *interpretation and discernment from a faith perspective* illumines the spiritual person. It leads to a ‘lived experience’ of the renewal of life, constituting fellowship with God.

‘Lived experiences’ of the wisdom of God

Lived experiences of the wisdom of God occur when a reader starts to participate in the environment and activities communicated in sacred texts. Such participation surely will

13. The adjective *spiritual* (πνευματικοί) in this context to be translated as ‘spiritual things’ (neuter) or ‘spiritual people’ (masculine) (Gardner 2018:n.p.).

14. The verb συγκρίνοντες can also be translated as ‘compare’ or ‘combine’ (ed. Danker 2000:953; Garland 2003:99).

15. Also translated as ‘natural man’.

16. Also ‘οὐδεὶς ἔγνωκεν’ (‘no one comprehends’) (2:11) and ‘οὐ δύναται γνῶναι’ (‘are unable to understand’) (2:12).

generate varieties of spiritualities related to the text as well as to God. These spiritualities are subject to what the text reveals regarding the divine along with the identity of the reader (cf. Iser 1978:131).

Wisdom discernment – vital communication among reader and text

Paul wanted to solve the two key issues of *faction* and *wisdom* in the Corinthian congregation. Hence, the question for Paul was: What does it mean to be πνευματικός? To address this enquiry, he utilises four rhetorical devices: *repetition*, *curiosity*, *juxtaposition*, *dialectic language* (network D).¹⁷ This facilitated Paul in his reasoning about the epistemology of πνευματικός [neuter] and his rhetoric to persuade the readers to become πνευματικοί [masculine] and have *lived experiences* of the 'Wisdom of God'.

Repetition of important and semantically related phrases and words

Waaïman (2002:744, in reference to Husserl), in his discussion of *Christian spirituality*, labels the recalling background of words in the reading process as 'retention' and the expected background 'protension'. Retention encompasses the text just read, and protension the text yet to be read. 'The tension created between retention and protension controls the reading experience' (Van der Merwe 2015:7; see also Waaïman 2002:744). The combination of these two activities creates firmness during the reading process of chapter 2, especially in the repetition of strategic lexemes. In chapter 2, the following strategic lexemes occur repetitively to create such firmness: αἰῶνος, γινώσκω, πνεῦμα, ἀνακρίνει, πνευματικά. They dominate the entire reasoning, rhetoric, and 'lived experiences' in this chapter to construct a dialectic of retention and protension.

The following repetitive lexemes are important and semantically related:

- *Wisdom*: Σοφίαν (vv. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13)
- *Ages*: τοῦ αἰῶνος (vv. 6 [2x], 7, 8)
- *Know*: γινώσκω (vv. 8, 11[2x], 14, 16); οἶδα (vv. 11, 12)
- *Spirit*: πνεῦμα (of God, vv. 11, 12, 14); (of man, v. 11); (of the world, v. 12)
- *Discern*: ἐκρίνά (v. 2); συγκρίνοντες (v. 13); ἀνακρίνεται (v. 14); ἀνακρίνει (v. 15); ἀνακρίνεται (v. 15)
- *Spirit(ual)*: πνευμα(τικά) (vv. 4, 10, 11[2x], 12; 13[2x]; 14[2x]) (Van der Merwe 2015:112–113)

Curiosity: Wisdom of God, mystery of God, spiritual things, mind of Christ

A second rhetorical device applied by Paul is to stimulate the *curiosity* of readers. In the first two chapters Paul denotes the *Wisdom of God* in terms of 'Wisdom of God' (1:21, 24, 30), 'Mystery of God' (2:1), 'Spiritual things' (2:13), and 'Mind of Christ' (2:16). Each reminiscent orientation in their linguistic context enlightens indefinite meanings regarding the wisdom of God. This, then, generates 'lived experiences' of

17. In this article, only repetition and curiosity will be addressed due to length restrictions.

inquisitiveness concerning the subject matter of the divine wisdom. Unfortunately, Paul does not clearly explain the divine wisdom. Readers can only draw meaning from the following references of Paul: 'the mystery of God' ('τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ') (2:1); 'spiritual things' ('πνευματικά') (2:13); 'gifts of the Spirit of God' ('τὰ¹⁸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ') (2:14) and the 'mind of Christ' ('νοῦν Χριστοῦ') (2:16).¹⁹

The importance and high frequency of references about divine *wisdom* in 2:1–16, launch its investigation. This will facilitate the reader to link the remaining semantically related references to the divine wisdom.

The wisdom of God: In the first pericope of chapter 2, Paul elucidates how he averted human wisdom and plausible reasoning when he addressed the Corinthians (2:1–5). He asserts his confidence to 'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ' (2:2). Therefore, his preaching revolved completely around Christ, the crucified (2:2; Schnelle 2005: 202 ff.).

The crucifixion deems to be God's power for salvation and the most provoking *wisdom* dimension of the gospel. Some years earlier than Schnelle (2005), Baird (1959:425–432) widened the denotation and discernment of this wisdom. He sought to encompass more than the crucifixion event and the elementary dogma surrounding the death of Jesus. According to Baird (1959:431–432), Paul's declaration 'to know nothing but Christ and him crucified' is not a limitation or demarcation of this declaration; it must obviously include God's complete plan and purpose of creation and redemption. Paul's declaration of the wisdom of God, in terms of its manifestation in the crucifixion of Christ, is therefore only a reference to the culmination of the revelation and consummation of God's whole drama of salvation (also cf. Gaffin 1995:108, 115).

In conclusion, the axiom *wisdom of God*, refers to Paul's orientation about God's intellectual capital. This allusion about God's wisdom surely would have rhetorically enticed inquisitiveness and attentiveness to comprehend it so much better. The test now is to discern what this wisdom comprises. According to Gaffin's reasoning above (1995:108, 115), this axiom, *wisdom of God* (θεοῦ σοφία), should be regarded as a composite (pregnant) phrase, referring to the 'message of the death of Christ, or more comprehensively, the gospel regarding Christ' (cf. 1 Cor 1:17a; Rm 1:16). This interpretation gains further confirmation when the term *mystery* recurs in the plural (μυστηρίων θεοῦ) (4:1). Grindheim (2002:696) verifies Gaffin's reasoning in his interpretation of the *overall and all-encompassing* wisdom of God 'to be a reference to the whole gospel or God's plan of salvation'.

18. The neutral plural accusative τὰ (v. 14) refers to the verb 'χαρισθέντα' in the previous verse (13) which can be translated, according to Danker (ed. 2000:1078), as 'to give freely as a favour, give graciously'.

19. For Iser (1978:168), gaps occur in texts when only marginal information is communicated in the text. This then ordinarily promotes the reader to fill the gaps with 'imaginative juxtapositions'. This draws the reader into reasoning in the text. The reader then consequently tries to fill the gap or to make sense with what is meant from what is not written. For Iser (1978:168), then, 'the *unsaid* comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the *said* "expands" to take on greater significance than might have been supposed'.

The mystery of God: Twice in chapter 2, Paul refers to the *wisdom of God* as *mystery* (μυστήριον) (2:1, 7) by verifying this understanding with two more semantically related references: ‘hiddenness’ (ἡ ἀποκεκρυμμένη) (2:7), and ‘the depths of God’ (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) (2:11; Van der Merwe 2013:115). Added to this, Paul uses two nouns (τὸ μυστήριον, τὰ βάθη) and the passive participle (ἡ ἀποκεκρυμμένη – functioning here as a noun) denoting this wisdom to be a being. This Pauline vocabulary, ‘mystery’, ‘hiddenness’, and ‘depths of God’ certainly generates further experiential inquisitiveness. To *whom* does it refer?

Paul’s characterisation of the wisdom of God as *hiddenness* (ἡ ἀποκεκρυμμένη) 2:(7) exposes it to be a mystery ‘which God decreed before the ages’ (ἦν προώρισεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων) (2:7) prior to God’s choice to reveal it. Then Paul’s denotation of this wisdom as ‘the depths of God’ (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) (2:10) refers undeniably to the detail salvation plan of God. According to 2:10–12, the Spirit of God acted as agent to unveil this wisdom or mystery to Paul (cf. 2:10–12). Therefore, Paul chooses to use the present tense when he refers to the Spirit’s *search* (ἐραυνᾶω) (2:10) of everything. This choice of ‘present tense’ can then be interpreted to refer to the ‘unceasing intra-divine activity of the Spirit of God’. This then empowers the Spirit to reveal to Paul the *deep things* (*wisdom*) of God (Kaiser 1981:315).

This wisdom, which constitutes the quintessence of Paul’s memorandum, is merely known by God himself. Therefore, Paul alludes to this wisdom as *mystery*. In the *corpus Paulinum*, a mystery refers to a ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ which nobody can discover by themselves. It is solely adequately comprehensible once revealed by God (Kaiser 1981:312).

In *conclusion*, God then has taken initiative to reveal God’s secrets, God’s hidden things, God’s wisdom initially through the Spirit of God and subsequently through Paul, a human instrument (λαλοῦμεν) (2:7, 13). This wisdom is brought to humanity and formulated in terms of a crucifixion idiom, where the wisdom, power, righteousness, and will of God transcends *mystery* and can be comprehended and experienced in (transcendent) curious modes.

Spiritual things: The *third* orientation about the *wisdom of God* is exposed in Paul’s choice of the adjective πνευματικά [spiritual things] (2:13). In chapter 2:11–14, Paul explains that God’s wisdom (formulated here as *spiritual things*) makes no sense to unbelievers. They are without the Spirit of God (ψυχικός) (2:14) and consequently incapable of accepting the spiritual things emanating from the Spirit. The gospel emerges to be imprudent to them, for they are incapable of ‘interpreting spiritual things’ (2:13). *Spiritual things* (πνευματικά) can only make sense to *spiritual people* (πνευματικοί) (Pratt 2000:37–38).

What Paul meant here is that unbelievers cannot lay hold of or deeply appropriate the Christian message. People without the Spirit are impaired in their ability to understand and accept the

instructions of the Spirit because their orientation in life is so contrary to the Spirit. (p. 38)

The teachings of the Spirit ‘are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are [*have to be*] spiritually discerned’ (2:14).

In *conclusion*, ‘spiritual people [*can*] discern all things’ appropriately (ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει [τὰ] πάντα) (2:15). This is because they experience the divine wisdom through the powerful inspiration of the Spirit. The discernment, provided by the Spirit of God, daily equips spiritual people (πνευματικοί) with spiritual things (πνευματικά) in every sphere of life.

The mind of Christ: The *fourth* orientation about the *wisdom of God* relates to the *mind of Christ*: ‘ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν’ (2:16). Again, Paul provides no definition to create inquisitiveness among his readers. Apparently, all spiritual people will desire to possess ‘the mind of Christ’. For Paul, having ‘the mind of Christ’, *firstly* facilitates a believer to comprehend and accurately discern the wisdom of God as ‘revealed to us by the Spirit’ (2:10). *Secondly*, ‘the mind of Christ’ also structures the new and idiosyncratic agenda by picturing a life rendering the wisdom of God. This new epistemology delineates applicable behaviour and furnishes the believer with the capacity to recognise and determine appropriately – both individually and corporately (Sweatman 2015:238). Schrage (1991:267) reasons that ‘the Christological application’ of Paul’s citation in verse 2:16, should be regarded as the key declaration. Paul’s substitute of Lord (κυρίου) for Christ (Χριστοῦ) seems to be of fundamental significance for him. Paul notifies the reader that all the critical references to Christ until this point, recount ‘a Christ crucified’ (1:17, 23–24, 30; 2:2). This infers that readers must desist all selfish aspirations to be charitable towards others. Grindheim (2002) formulates this point of Paul so adequately:

To be spiritual ... is to have apprehended the word of the cross in such a way that it has transformed the entire existence of the believer into its image – to a cruciform life, a life characterized by self-sacrificing love, and where power is manifest through weakness. (p. 708, 709)

Finally, Paul’s conception of the *mind of Christ* meticulously recounts the subject matter of the *wisdom of God*. It denotes a spiritual person in relation with Christ and the Spirit, endeavouring to appropriate the message of the gospel (Kistemaker 2001:94). In context, Paul’s concise statement, *mind of Christ*, relates to be *obedient* to Christ. Therefore, this appeal from Paul is a paradigm for Christian discipleship (cf. 2 Cor 5:15; Dunn 2003:250). According to the rhetoric in chapter 2, Paul is convinced that life, according to the ‘mind of Christ’, enables believers to (1) rightly know and discern the wisdom of God as exposed through the Spirit; and (2) rightly operate and experience the ‘mind of Christ’ as a renewing and idiosyncratic agenda for perceiving life and being aware of how to abide in God’s wisdom (Sweatman 2015:238).

A practice of dialectics

Another *rhetorical mechanism* applied by Paul is that of dialectics. Paul methodically juxtaposes dialectic specifics or thoughts with the intention of influencing the reader to reach a point of discernment.

Divine wisdom in contrast with worldly wisdom: Never in Paul's lengthy analysis of wisdom, beginning at 1:18 forward, does he delineate the *wisdom* concept that depicts the divisions in Corinth; neither does he delineate the concept of wisdom for the spiritually matured (2:6 ff.). In fact, this was not Paul's intent. This would have diverted his entire reasoning. His absolute objective was to emphatically contrast the dialectic wisdoms of God and human beings, with the effect that a reader will endeavour to comprehend God's wisdom instead of worldly wisdom. This dialectic is apparent in the following opposing references of Paul to *human wisdom*:

'your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God' (2:5)

'these things not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, ...' (2:13)

Paul's intention was to convince the Corinthian congregation of the immense divergence between these two wisdoms. Each account is additionally described with the aid of contrasts which are well-known via recurring composition: οὐκ ... ἀλλὰ [not ... but] (2:4, 6–7, 13). A synergy of human wisdom typifies it as 'lofty words of wisdom' (2:1) or 'plausible words of wisdom' (2:4); even 'a wisdom of this age' (2:6) 'or of the rulers of this age' (2:6, 8). 'None of the rulers of this age understood this' (2:8). Therefore, they 'have crucified the Lord of glory' (2:8).

Paul regards divine wisdom as 'secret and hidden' (2:7) and verifies this interpretation with his clarification that it is part of 'the depths of God' (2:10). Only God knows it. Only the Spirit could expose, communicate, and interpret it to spiritual people. Paul reasons that only spiritual people who connected with this wisdom can 'have the mind of Christ' (2:16). This wisdom exceeds human reason and cannot be obtained from experiential causes, conventional understanding within the congregation, or even natural insight or ingenuity. This orientation of Paul abandons all possible worldly sources for prompting divine wisdom. As a result, this wisdom only originates from God. Therefore, Paul's claim is correct: *God* revealed, and *God* disclosed God's divine mind via God's Spirit to Paul,²⁰ a human being. This disclosure, furthermore, is not only embedded in doctrine (εἰδῶμεν)²¹ (2:12) but especially in 'lived experiences' (γινώσκω) (2:14).²²

20. Paul suggests here the resonance between the 'mind of a spiritual person' with the 'mind of God'. People, under control of the Spirit of God, will desire to fulfil divine principles, to be obedient to God's will, and to reflect God's glory (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:93).

21. Christians are those who can understand and evaluate what is from God because of the indwelling Spirit (Gardner 2018:ch 6).

22. According to Danker (2000:200) 'to grasp the significance or meaning of someth[ing], understand, comprehend'. In the *Corpus Paulinum*, the verb γινώσκω

The spiritual man versus the natural man: In chapter 2, Paul refers to two decisive and interrelated aspects which are necessary to discern God's wisdom: a believer must experience *intellectual* and *continuous transformation*. Paul critically explains these two aspects in a comparative in chapter 2:12–16. Here, he attends to the two most distinct cognitive reactions to the revelation of divine wisdom as mediated through the Spirit. Paul compares the intellectual faculties of a spiritual person (πνευματικοί) with that of an unspiritual person (ψυχικοί). In this comparison, he addresses their 'intellectual disparities' (Van der Merwe 2013:125). This is evident in chapter 2 from the vast presence of semantic related verbs concerning perception.²³ Paul argues that before any discernment of divine wisdom, that person must experience a fundamental intellectual transformation and renewal. Only the Spirit of God can accomplish this. Only those, then, who endure to live spiritually, can progressively discern the ultimate wisdom of God via the mediation of the Spirit (Van der Merwe 2013:125, 126).

Due to Paul's interest in explaining God's wisdom, he expounds in more detail on the discernment of the spiritual person. This is in comparison to the perception of the unspiritual person who could not perceive any form of divine wisdom. The following table (2:12–16) characterises the spiritual person in contrast to the unspiritual person:

This comparison concentrates on the human cognitive level. Paul's line of thinking seems to be progressive: *unspiritual people* have the spirit of the world. They do not possess the Spirit of God and therefore they cannot partake in the gifts of God's Spirit²⁴ – to them it seems to be foolishness (2:14) – they are unable to capture it (2:14). The *mature* (2:6), *those who are spiritual* (2:13), received the Spirit of God to enable the understanding of divine gifts (2:12). They 'are taught by the Spirit' (2:13) – 'discern all things' (2:15) and are therefore both 'subject to no one else's scrutiny' (2:15) and 'have the mind of Christ' (2:16).

The πνευματικοί, in radical contrast to the ψυχικοί, have (cf. Table 1):

- *Received the Spirit that is from God* (2:12): God's Spirit became the principal power of life (cf. Gal. 6:1) in these Christians. They are spiritual for they are 'indwelt, renewed, enlightened, directed by the Holy Spirit' (Gaffin 1995:114). They are contrary to those directed by the world spirit (2:12; cf. Eph. 2:2). Ciampa and Rosner (2010:134) claim that in the rest of this pericope (2:14–16), Paul gives 'an exposition of the mature: the spiritual person'.

..... does not refer to merely theoretical knowledge but personal knowledge that is dependent on revelation from God. In this context, the two verbs καταλαμβάνω and γινώσκω work together. The first relates to intellectual knowledge, while the latter relates to experiential knowledge (Johnson 2008:131).

23. Καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη, οἶδα [3x], κρίνω, συγκρίνω, ἀνακρίνω [3x], γινώσκω, ἔγνω, γινώσκω [3x] and a noun (νοῦν, 2x). For Paul, within the Greek environment where reasoning, intellectuality and cognition were important, the revitalisation of the mind was decisive 'for discerning God's wisdom'. To enlighten the importance of this, Paul juxtaposes the minds of the spiritual person with that of the unspiritual person. In 1:24, he states that 'those who are called' ('αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς') interpret the cross in a different way than 'the wise' (τοῦς σοφοῦς) (1:27; Cardona 2022:275).

24. Paul substitutes the 'wisdom of God' with the 'gifts of the Spirit' in 2:12.

TABLE 1: An assessment of the unspiritual person with the spiritual person.

ψυχικός άνθρωπος	πνευματικός
^{2:12} 'Now we have received not the <i>spirit of the world</i> ,	¹² '...but the <i>Spirit that is from God</i> , so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God'.
¹⁴ 'Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them',	¹³ '... but <i>taught by the Spirit</i> , interpreting spiritual things to those who are <i>spiritual</i> '.
¹⁴ '...and they are <i>unable to understand</i> them because they are spiritually discerned'.	¹⁵ 'Those who are spiritual <i>discern all things</i> , ...and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny'.
	¹⁶ '... <i>But we have the mind of Christ</i> '.

- *Been taught by the Spirit* (2:13): These πνευματικοί are 'taught by the Spirit'. The adjective taught (διδασκτός) denotes 'that which is imparted by the Spirit to someone' (ed. Danker 2000:241). Spiritual things (πνευματικὰ) emanate through spiritual articulation as taught by the Spirit, that is 'interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual'. The meaning of this phrase is clear: *spiritual people* (πνευματικοί) must converse with one another about aspects of faith and communicate spiritual mysteries to others who are spiritual.²⁵ This interpretation agrees well with the following two verses, where the apostle distinguishes natural persons from spiritual persons, and affirms that *natural people* cannot perceive anything²⁶ coming from God's Spirit (ed. Manetsch 2017:44).
- *Discern all things* (2:15): this subsection about 'discernment (ἀνακρίνω) of all things' takes the previous subsection, about the teaching (διδασκτός) 'by the Spirit', a step further:

As ... 'the Spirit ... *searches everything*' (πάντα) (2:10), so do 'those who are spiritual *discern ... all things*' (πάντα) (2:15).

The investigating Spirit envisages 'everything' (πάντα). This resonates πάντα with the object of the searching activity executed by the Spirit of God in 2:10 (Gaffin 1995:115). Kistemaker and Hendriksen (2001:93) correctly interpret the assertion 'all things' to signify the broad continuum of human existence. This does not mean that spiritual people are specialists in every sphere of life. They can, however, assess all things spiritually.

In *conclusion*: Paul's evaluation of the natural person (ψυχικός) in comparison to the spiritual person (πνευματικός) asserts that only the spiritual person can progressively recognise the absolute divine wisdom. This is experienced in a reciprocal relationship between the spiritual person continuously living spiritually, and the dynamic of intermediation by God's Spirit. Paul consistently employs these dialectics to meticulously balance the conflicting proponents. The only objective he had in mind was to bring about a resolution vis-à-vis their contradictions.

25. In his communication about maturity to the Corinthians, Paul refers to five groups: (1) 'those who are spiritual' in 2:13, 15 and 3:1; (2) 'Those who are unspiritual' (Revised Standard Version [RSV]; New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]), literally 'the natural man' (New American Standard Bible [NASB]) in 2:14; (3) 'people of the flesh' Revised Standard Version (RSV), or the 'carnal' (σαρκίνοις) (NASB) in 3:1; (4) 'infants in Christ' in 3:1; and (5) 'the worldly' in 3:3 (σαρκικοί – slightly different Greek word as in 3:1) (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:134–135).

26. See also 'wisdom of God', 'gifts of the Spirit' (cf. 2:10).

Effects of the wisdom of God

To be in Christ, effects 'lived experiences'²⁷ of him, resulting in intimate fellowship with him and other spiritual people united with him. Therefore, union with Christ must be regarded as an honour and, simultaneously, as an obligation that requires a life devoted to him (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:65).

1 Corinthians 1 recalls that 'Christ became for us wisdom from God' (1:24). Paul explains this in terms of 'righteousness, sanctification, and redemption' (1:30). These three nouns do not manage wisdom, but rather denote effects 'of the wisdom which those who are spiritual find in Christ,²⁸ in whom they are justified, sanctified, and redeemed (cf. 6:11)'. Thus, the NIV translation states, 'Christ ... has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption'. Although Paul does not expound on these effects in this pericope, he does so at various places throughout the letter (Taylor 2014:n.p.).

The key is that the cross could be seen as the pivot or axis around which the mystery of God is available for Christian-participation. The aim is to effect continuous lived experiences of this God-participation in and through the Spirit for the Christian's ongoing transformation and self-transcendence into *living* the mind of Christ. Only when the Christians in Corinth appropriated, recontextualised, and assimilated the cross of Christ in their lives they could experience the effects of the wisdom of God. Paul outlines this already in 1:29–30, highlighting the 'presence of God' *lived* in Christ as 'righteousness', 'holiness' (sanctification) and 'redemption'.²⁹ The Corinthian is motivated to realise the same in Christ through the power of the Spirit. A spirituality composed of lived experiences of Paul's understanding and rhetoric of the wisdom of God would thus emerge with the cross as the pivot between knowledge and participation, and between understood and realised self-transcendence into the divine. The risk, the sacrifice, the commitment to a hidden wisdom, now revealed through Paul, is the Corinthian's cross when abandoning all that is not righteous, unholy, and devoid of the pursuit of redemption.

27. A spiritual 'lived experience' of the wisdom of God is *firstly* for Christian believers to experience themselves in 'the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (1 Cor 1:9). *Consequently*, the image of Jesus Christ must develop both experientially and more visibly in these believers (Gl 4:19). Such spiritual experiences, furthermore, can be evaluated as an 'interaction' or 'encountering' with 'God our Father' (1:3; cf. Pretorius 2008:160).

28. The triad of 'δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις' [righteousness, holiness, redemption] (1:30) are the fruit of God's wisdom in Christ. Believers *have* these things in Christ (Witherington 1995:334). These three qualities are not bestowed on believers in terms of belonging; they share in these things by virtue of belonging to the crucified Christ (Schrage 1991:215).

29.1. The lived experience of the 'righteousness' of God implies a participation in the cross of Christ because the Christian must 'sacrifice' what is NOT God's righteousness in his own life and replace it by integrating God's righteousness.
2. The lived experience of the 'holiness of/sanctification' in God is a participation in the cross of Christ because the cross annihilates what is NOT holy in the Christian and what does not contribute to that Christian's sanctification.
3. The lived experience of 'redemption' is a participation in the cross of Christ because God effects redemption of the Christian in and through the cross of Christ; such is the wisdom of God no longer a mystery but the means to God-consciousness through lived experiences by the Christian. If the cross remains a stumbling block and is rejected, then God's wisdom remains an unfathomable mystery.

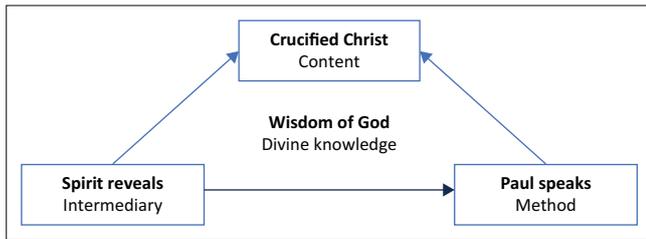


FIGURE 2: A diagrammatical presentation of Paul's epistemological reasoning regarding the wisdom of God according to 1 Corinthians 2:10-14.

Conclusion

The above exploration of 1 Corinthians 2 distinctly indicates that the prominent subject of divine wisdom, which Paul reviews in this chapter, warrants fundamental recognition.

Paul contemplates on 'the revelation of the eternal, hidden wisdom of God'. 'These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit' (2:10), are 'taught by the Spirit' (2:13) and 'are spiritually discerned' (2:14). All the above interrelated replications about the wisdom of God have been used by Paul to accentuate the significance of the discernment of divine wisdom. His intention is to mobilise readers, firstly, to be converted into *πνευματικοί*; and secondly, to continuously experience both an intellectual and behavioural dynamic and change. This is the crux of lived experiences in a spirituality, which facilitate transformation from human constraints into divine wisdom, and self-transcendence from the limited logic of Apollos, Chloë, and Greek philosophy to divine participation in a God-dynamic in Christ. The Spirit reveals this; the Spirit facilitates this; and Paul is the messenger.

This directly relates to the definition of spirituality adopted by this article. As stated in the Introduction, spirituality refers to 'living a life of transformation and self-transcendence that resonates with the lived experience of the divine'. The 'lived experience of the divine-human relationship' is essentially constituted by becoming *πνευματικοί* through the self-realisation of the wisdom of God in the life of the Christian believer. This happens when the discernment of the wisdom of God releases a divine impulse of the Spirit of God, prompting and mobilising a 'divine-human relationship'. Participation in that God principle, essential to the dynamics of the wisdom of God in God's *πνευματικοί*, immerses them in wisdom's exposure of the cross of Christ. This is what effects 'living a life of transformation and self-transcendence'. The continuous experience of such participation pulsates with an efficacy towards an intellectual and behavioural dynamic and change (cf. Van der Merwe 2014:373).

Paul aimed to expose his view on divine wisdom, which was in stark contrast to the Corinthian understanding of true knowledge as wisdom. Nevertheless, he ended up disclosing a whole epistemological system that embraced not only content but also method, form and 'lived experiences'. Such a system can be delineated as follows:

This diagram about 'Divine knowledge or wisdom of God' reflects what Paul endeavours to communicate in 1 Corinthians 2. True wisdom is the message of the cross (revealed as the culmination of revelation and the consummation of God's salvation in Christ [Baird 1959: 431–432; also cf. Gaffin 1995:108, 115]). It is an independent variable (nobody can change or distort this message) as well as a dependent variable (it needs to be revealed by the Spirit). Only the Holy Spirit can disclose the essence of wisdom (2:10–16) and postulate appropriate language for its diffusion (2:13). Preaching is totally dependent on both – the word of the cross and the Spirit. All proclamation should be Christ-centred, which presupposes a previous revelation by the Spirit. However, the 'lived experiences' of the 'wisdom of God' are strictly dependent on content, method, and behaviour. The main reason is that the message of the cross is not to be kept for oneself – it is to be shared and proclaimed to others (cf. Cardona 2022:286).

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