

The Word of Wisdom (1Cor 12:8) in Context

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I. Introduction

What is the “word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8)? It is the first gift listed among the nine spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. It has received relatively little attention compared to the gifts of tongues or prophecy. Given that Paul treated wisdom with great importance in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians, the lack of attention to this gift is not Paul’s issue but instead due to its significance being overlooked by the church in subsequent eras. This gift has not only escaped the attention of the church but also has not been a critical focus of scholarly research.

The reason for the lack of scholarly research on the word of wisdom is not because scholars agree on its interpretation without debate. In fact, there are sharply contrasting views among scholars regarding the basic understanding of this gift. Wayne A. Grudem effectively categorizes the scholarly views on the word of wisdom into two main perspectives: the Wise Speech View and the Sudden Revelation View.¹⁾ The former

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1) Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 293-302.

refers to the ability to speak through acquired wisdom, while the latter refers to speaking through a momentary revelation. Non-Pentecostal New Testament scholars typically adopt the first view, whereas Pentecostal biblical scholars generally support the second view.²⁾

The following points are commonly presented as evidence for the Wise Speech View:

First, Solomon's wisdom is not something that manifests suddenly and then disappears. Rather, it is continuously inherent in him, much like his character. Solomon used his wisdom to distinguish the true mother of a living child and said, "Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other." (1 Kings 3:25, NRSV). "All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice." (1 Kings 3:28, NRSV).

Second, when there was a dispute among believers in the Corinthian church, Paul suggested that it could be resolved not by sudden revelation but by someone who consistently possessed wisdom. He said, "Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that?" (1 Cor. 6:5-6, NRSV).

The following points are commonly presented as evidence for the Sudden Revelation View:

First, in the incident involving Ananias and Sapphira in Acts

2) The wise speech view comprises the majority. R. E. Ciampa & B. S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 576; A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 939-940. However, all are in agreement with the majority view. See G. D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 166; W. and R. P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 195-197.

5, Peter received information that could not have been known by human means, revealing through the Holy Spirit that the couple had withheld part of the proceeds from selling their land. Peter addressed this by saying, “Ananias, Peter asked, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land?” (Acts 5:3, NRSV). This is the gift of the word of knowledge, which pairs with the gift of the word of wisdom and demonstrates that the ability is not inherent but instead comes as a sudden revelation.

Second, Paul describes wisdom in 1 Corinthians as something revealed through the Holy Spirit, emphasizing its nature as a direct revelation. “God’s wisdom” is described as “secret and hidden,” and it “has been revealed to us through the Spirit.” (1 Cor. 2:7, 10, NRSV).

Grudem supports the first view, arguing that the second view lacks sufficient evidence.³⁾ In this paper, however, I intend to argue that Grudem’s view lacks support, and that the Sudden Revelation View better aligns with Paul’s intentions. What evidence do I present to assert that the Sudden Revelation View is what Paul meant? I attempt to show as follows. First, Paul’s theological idea of the word of wisdom supports this view, and second, the historical context of the Corinthian church, to which Paul addressed this statement, also substantiates it.

2. In the Theological Context

3) Grudem bases his argument on the following points 1) “Paul’s words give no hint of a sudden revelation of wisdom or knowledge.” 2) “Paul uses the term ‘prophecy’ to refer to reporting something that is suddenly revealed by the Holy Spirit.” 3) “Paul’s argument requires some non-miraculous gifts in his list of nine.” Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 293-302.

2.1. The Nature of the Word of Wisdom

Paul's depiction of the gift of the word of wisdom as a sudden revelation through the Holy Spirit is evident in the terminology he uses to describe this gift. The term Paul directly employs to define this gift is φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος (1 Cor. 12:7). The word of wisdom is listed as one of the nine manifestations of the Spirit. The terms used to explain this gift include χαρίσματα (1 Cor. 12:4, 31) and πνευματικά (1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1). In this context, we will examine what each term reveals about the nature of the word of wisdom.⁴⁾

2.1.1. Gifts (χαρίσματα)

Paul commands, "Strive for the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31, NRSV), referring to the nine manifestations of the Spirit (12:8-10), including the word of wisdom, as gifts. In the New Testament, the term χαρίσματα is used 17 times, appearing once in 1 Peter 4:10 and the rest exclusively in Paul's letters, indicating it is primarily a Pauline term. This term is fundamentally derived from χάρις, meaning "grace," and its etymological root suggests that it is a "product of grace" (μα). In Paul's letters, this term is synonymous with grace (Rom. 5:15, 16; 6:23), encompassing a wide range of meanings.⁵⁾

Even within 1 Corinthians, χάρισμα refers to various things, such as the gift of celibacy (7:7), offices like apostle, prophet,

4) In a previous article aimed at defining the nature of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I analyzed the following three terms. The following content is newly written according to the purpose of this paper while partially utilizing the content from that previous article as needed. 김동수, "성령의 은사의 본질" 「피어선신학논단」 (2012), 6-11.

5) S. Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 4-5.

and teacher (12:27-28), and manifestations of supernatural power like the gift of healing (12:9, 29, 30). Therefore, identifying the word of wisdom as a gift does not necessarily indicate that it is a supernatural, instantaneous revelation. In Paul's letters, a gift's nature does not inherently denote its supernatural character. As seen above, some gifts in 1 Corinthians are natural (12:27-28) while others are supernatural (12:9). Expanding to other Pauline letters, gifts can include general natural talents (Rom. 12:6-8) and church offices (Eph. 4:11-12). The term *χαρίσματα* functions as an umbrella concept, encompassing both natural and supernatural gifts.⁶⁾

In summary, calling the word of wisdom a gift signifies that it is given to the community by God's grace. However, it does not specify whether this wisdom is continuously endowed to an individual or given suddenly through revelation by the Holy Spirit. It simply indicates that it is not a natural talent given to all at birth but a special gift bestowed upon the church community members through the grace of God.

2.1.2. Spiritual Things (πνευματικά)

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul titles his discussion on spiritual gifts with *Περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν* ("concerning spiritual gifts"). Many translations, including the NRSV, render *πνευματικῶν* as "spiritual gifts," though its etymological meaning is "spiritual things (or persons)." Grammatically, it can be translated as "spiritual persons" (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1; 14:37) if taken as masculine plural, or "spiritual things" (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:11; 10:3-4; 14:1) if taken as neuter plural. Given the overall context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and the usage in 14:1 as "spiritual things," I, along with many scholars, believe that Paul intended the latter.

6) Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience*, 195-197.

So, what does ‘spiritual’ mean here? In Paul’s letters, the term ‘spiritual’ has various meanings. Limiting our focus to 1 Corinthians, we see three primary uses, particularly when contrasted with opposing terms:

Opposition to Unbelieving: In 1 Corinthians 2:14-15, Paul contrasts the “spiritual person” (ὁ πνευματικὸς) with the “unspiritual person” (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος), who cannot accept the gifts of the Spirit. The unspiritual person refers to the unregenerate unbeliever, one who remains in their natural state. Here, the spiritual person is the one who has received the Holy Spirit.

Opposition to Immature: In 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, Paul contrasts the spiritual with the fleshly (σαρκίνους), describing the latter as immature in faith. “I could not speak to you as spiritual people (πνευματικοίς), but rather as people of the flesh (σαρκίνους), as infants in Christ (νηπίους ἐν Χριστῷ).” Thus, a spiritual person is one who is mature.

Opposition to Rational: In the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14, ‘spiritual’ is contrasted with ‘rational.’ Paul discusses spiritual things starting in 12:1 and clarifies in 14:14-15. He describes praying in tongues as praying in the Spirit (14:2) and contrasts it with praying with the mind (14:15). Unlike earlier contrasts, the rational is not bad but is recommended alongside the spiritual.⁷⁾ Paul emphasizes the need for both rational and spiritual elements in worship, mentioning “a hymn, lesson” (rational) along with “a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation” (spiritual) (14:26).

The ‘word of wisdom’ in 1 Corinthians 12:8 is one of these ‘spiritual things’ Paul discusses in chapters 12-14. Here, ‘spiritual’ signifies something beyond rational, that is supernatural. Paul distinguishes between spiritual and rational

7) Interpreting the rational aspect positively appears in 1 Corinthians 2:16 with the phrase “the mind of the Spirit” and is also found in Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 10:5.

activities in Corinthian worship, valuing both. He advocates for spiritual and rational prayers and praises (14:15), expecting both to build up the church and individuals according to their unique properties. Ignoring this distinction would go against Paul's intention.

What, then, is the relationship between the two terms Paul uses to describe the "word of wisdom," 'χαρίσματα' and 'πνευματικά'? Some scholars argue that the latter term was used by the Corinthian church, particularly by an elite group who considered themselves more spiritual, while the former was Paul's term, used to correct their understanding by emphasizing these gifts as gracious gifts from God.⁸⁾

However, this interpretation needs to be revised. Paul uses the term 'spiritual person' (πνευματικός) in a positive sense (1 Cor. 14:37), indicating that he does not oppose the use of the term but instead seeks to clarify its meaning. It is more appropriate to understand that in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul uses 'χαρίσματα' as a broad term encompassing all kinds of gifts given by God, while 'πνευματικά' refers to a specific subset of those gifts.

E. Ellis proposed that 'πνευματικά' refers to "prophetic- type gifts,"⁹⁾ which are "gifts of inspired utterance or discernment."¹⁰⁾ This aligns with Paul's classification in 1 Corinthians 14:37, where he groups "prophets" and "spiritual persons" together. Thus, spiritual gifts can be seen as a subset of 'χαρίσματα' that includes gifts like prophecy.

Paul introduces 'χαρίσματα' in 1 Corinthians 12:4 to address the broader category of gifts. Then he zooms in on 'πνευματικά'

8) Cf. R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1977), 206.

9) E. Ellis, "Prophecy in the New Testament Church and Today," in *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today*, ed. J. Pabagopoulos (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 48.

10) E. Ellis, "Spiritual Gifts in the Pauline Community," *NTS* 20 (1973-74), 128.

to explain the specific issues related to spiritual gifts within the Corinthian church. This approach is supported by scholars like William and Robert P. Menzies, who see Paul using ‘χαρίσματα’ as an umbrella term before delving into the specifics of ‘πνευματικά’. Therefore, Paul uses ‘χαρίσματα’ to refer to all types of gifts given by God, including natural, supernatural, callings, and offices. ‘πνευματικά’ is a subset within ‘χαρίσματα,’ explicitly referring to spiritual gifts that involve inspired utterance or discernment. This distinction helps to clarify the nature of the “word of wisdom” as a sudden revelation through the Spirit, as opposed to wisdom gained through human experience or effort.¹¹⁾

Max Turner argues that there is no tension between so-called ‘general gifts’ and ‘particular gifts’ in 1 Corinthians 12-14. He asserts that all gifts are spiritual, given to those who have received the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:8-10). According to Turner, the main distinction lies in their duration: general gifts are continuous, while particular gifts are temporary or situational.¹²⁾

However, this interpretation needs to be more accurate in what Paul aims to convey in 1 Corinthians 12-14. When addressing the issues related to ‘spiritual things’ (1 Cor. 12:1) within the Corinthian church, Paul introduces the umbrella term ‘χαρίσματα’ (1 Cor. 12:4) to refer to all kinds of gifts given by God. Within this broad category, he specifically discusses ‘spiritual gifts,’ which exceed mere rational abilities. Paul’s use of ‘χαρίσματα’ encompasses natural gifts, supernatural gifts, callings, and offices. The term ‘πνευματικά’ refers to a specific subset of these gifts—those that involve inspired utterance or discernment. This distinction clarifies that while all gifts come from the Spirit, ‘spiritual gifts’ go beyond rational capacities.

In summary, Paul’s discussion of gifts in 1 Corinthians

11) So Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 195-196.

12) Max Turner, “Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Formation in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22 (2013), 194.

12-14 differentiates between general and particular gifts, not in terms of their spiritual origin, but in terms of their nature and function. ‘χαρίσματα’ includes all gifts given by God, while ‘πνευματικά’ explicitly refers to spiritual gifts that are supernatural and surpass rational understanding. This understanding provides a more nuanced interpretation of Paul’s teachings on spiritual gifts and their roles within the church.

2.1.3. The Manifestation of the Spirit (φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος)

The term that directly defines the nature of the word of wisdom is “the manifestation of the Spirit” (12:7). Here, the Greek φανέρωσις, translated as manifestation, appears only in 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 2 Corinthians 4:2 in the New Testament. It signifies something that is revealed or made known. Anthony C. Thiselton suggests translating φανέρωσις in 1 Corinthians 12:7 as “the public manifestation,”¹³⁾ while the NRSV translates it as “the open statement” in 2 Corinthians 4:2. This word denotes something that is plainly evident to people, whether it to the Spirit (τοῦ πνεύματος) or truth (τῆς ἀληθείας).

It resembles how Luke describes the disciples experiencing the Spirit in Acts: “appeared” (2:3), there was “sound” (2:2, 6), they “heard” (2:6), and they “saw” (8:18). These are vivid occurrences! Indeed, such clear manifestations could also be applied to the fruit of the Spirit, as proposed by Wayne A. Grudem.¹⁴⁾ However, viewing the fruits of the Spirit as subtle manifestations through individuals rather than overt ones is more accurate.

Paul uses words synonymous with manifestation to describe

13) Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 936.

14) Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 295-296.

its nature. In 1 Corinthians 2:4, he contrasts his speaking and preaching not as persuasive words of wisdom but “with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως). Here, the manifestation of the Spirit is powerful and instantaneous.

Another word that describes the word of wisdom in this context is revelation (14:6, 26, 29). Revelation is also used to refer to the gift of prophecy (14:26, 29), but in 14:6 it is used to distinguish it from the gift of prophecy. Paul contrasts speaking in tongues—the meaning of which is not understood—with “some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching” (14:6). Considering that the first three refer to the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, if we look at the order there, revelation corresponds to the word of wisdom. Thus, if prophecy manifested instantaneously in 1 Corinthians 14:26, 29, the word of wisdom also manifested suddenly. Therefore, both manifestation and its synonymous terms indicate something originating directly from God rather than human experience. This indeed reflects that the word of wisdom is a sudden revelation.

In summary, in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul uses terms like gifts, spiritual things, and manifestation to describe the word of wisdom. Gifts indicate it as a gift of grace, spiritual things highlight its supernatural nature, and manifestation reveals its sudden revelatory character. Therefore, for Paul, the “word of wisdom” is given through sudden revelation.

2.2. The Word of Wisdom as Distinct from the Wisdom of God

In 1 Corinthians, Paul treats wisdom a critical topic. He distinguishes between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God, and in my view, he also distinguishes between wisdom itself and the word of wisdom.¹⁵⁾

2.2.1. The Wisdom of the World (1:20)

If Proverbs distinguishes between wisdom and foolishness, then Paul distinguishes between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world in 1 Corinthians. When Paul speaks of worldly wisdom, he refers to the persuasive techniques characteristic of Hellenistic wisdom.¹⁶⁾ He describes this as “eloquent wisdom” (1:17) and “plausible words of wisdom” (2:4). If someone follows such wisdom, according to James D. G. Dunn, one’s “faith becomes a matter of rational persuasion.”¹⁷⁾ Paul also labels this worldly wisdom as “human wisdom” (2:13) or “a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age” (2:6). Its source is human, and the rulers of this world employ it to dominate others. By means of this wisdom, neither God nor the message of the cross can be understood (1:21-23). Nevertheless, Paul indicates that those possessing this worldly wisdom mistakenly believe themselves to possess true wisdom. They deceive even themselves (3:18; 4:10).

2.2.2. The Wisdom of God (1:21)

God’s wisdom stands in stark contrast to worldly wisdom. It is the wisdom that God ordained beforehand for the glory of His people, described as “secret and hidden” (2:7). This divine revelation comes through the Spirit (2:10), who searches the depths of God and reveals them to His disciples. Such revelation is powerfully experienced alongside the Spirit’s empowerment (2:4). This process of knowing God through the Spirit is termed

15) For the nature of wisdom as presented in 1 Corinthians, see R. Scorggs, “Paul: ΣΟΦΟΣ and ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟΣ,” *NTS* 14 (1967-68), 33-55.

16) T. H. Lim, “Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom but in Demonstrations of the Spirit and Power,” *NovT* 29 (1987), 137.

17) J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 219.

“Paul’s Pneumatic Epistemology” by Seung-won Yu.¹⁸⁾

So, what is the content of the wisdom that the Spirit reveals?¹⁹⁾ It is the plan of God’s salvation through the cross of Jesus. This “message about the cross” is “a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles” (1:23), yet to those who receive the Spirit, “[crucified] Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:24). Here, Jesus embodies divine wisdom. This wisdom, conveyed through the Spirit’s revelation, is essentially the *Heilsplan* (plan of salvation). In the words of Dunn, it is “the recognition of the activity of God, in particular the recognition that God’s salvation history centers on the crucified Messiah.”²⁰⁾

However, God not only gives this revelation but also grants the *Heilsgut* (benefits of salvation)—the experiential realization of His salvation plan on earth. Therefore, understanding this salvation plan is part of God’s wisdom, which also encompasses experiencing it. This participation in God’s salvation on earth is vividly expressed during preaching as “a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (2:4). As Dunn insightfully phrases it,²¹⁾ Romans 1:16 states that this is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.”

2.2.3. The Word of Wisdom (12:8)

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, “word of wisdom” is mentioned, but only the phrase itself appears, so we can only make reasonable guesses about its content. Given that prophecy and the word

18) Seung Won Yu, “*Paul’s Pneumatic Epistemology: Its Significance in His Letters*,” (Ph. D. dissertation; Duke University, 1998).

19) Cf. D. Baird, “Among the Mature: The Idea of Wisdom in 1 Cor 2:6,” *Int* 13 (1959), 423-432.

20) Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 220.

21) *Ibid.*

of wisdom are given as momentary revelations (14:6, 26, 29), we can infer that the content of the word of wisdom is not significantly different from the content of prophecy. Suppose the content of prophecy includes “encouragement and consolation” (14:3) or “reproving” (14:24) rather than solely *Heilsplan*. In that case it is reasonable to speculate that the word of wisdom is similar. Therefore, like prophecy, the word of wisdom may be intended to comfort and admonish others for the upbuilding of the community. So, what distinguishes the word of wisdom from prophecy? Prophecy has God as its speaker, and the person delivers the message. In contrast, the word of wisdom is spoken by a person and is a direct, momentary revelation of the Holy Spirit concerning matters of faith and God’s wisdom.

Another difference between God’s wisdom and the word of wisdom is that while God’s wisdom should be possessed by all Christians, the word of wisdom is suddenly given to some individuals. God’s wisdom is the realization of the gospel of the cross through the revelation of the Spirit, given universally to Christians (2:10). It is given without distinction to Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, men or women (1 Cor. 1:24; 12:13; Gal. 3:27-29). In contrast, the word of wisdom, as a manifestation of the Spirit, occurs sovereignly in the community for the upbuilding (12:11), appearing in the worship of the community through appropriate individuals at the right time.

The idea that wisdom is given as a momentary revelation to build the community is a significant advancement from the Old Testament, where the wise person is influenced positively through wise words. The person through whom this gift manifests does not necessarily need to be wise. In the case of the word of wisdom, it is God who chooses and enables them to speak words of wisdom through revelation. Therefore, if someone has received wisdom through revelation, they speak the word of wisdom through momentary revelation, even if they may not

be considered wise in the Old Testament sense of being a sage.

So, how does Paul distinguish and connect the wisdom of God and the word of wisdom?²²⁾ Simply put, one might think of the word of wisdom as the expression of such wisdom in words.²³⁾ As shown above, this is not the case.

2.2.4. Relationship with Old Testament Wisdom

How does the “word of wisdom” that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians relate to the wisdom found in the Old Testament, especially in the Wisdom Literature such as Proverbs? What are the points of similarity and the sharp differences?

First, the “wisdom of God” that Paul speaks of shares a connection with the wisdom described in Proverbs, as it is more akin to Jewish rather than Hellenistic wisdom. In Proverbs, the starting point of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7), and similarly, the source of wisdom in Paul’s writings is God (1 Cor. 1:21). Furthermore, the worldly wisdom Paul refers to (1 Cor. 1:20) is not unlike the foolishness or lack of wisdom mentioned in Proverbs (Prov. 1:7).

Second, while the wisdom in Proverbs is a practical skill or ability that arises from the fear of God in daily life,²⁴⁾ Paul’s

22) For the view that 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 are closely connected, see the following. Yu, “Paul’s Pneumatic Epistemology: Its Significance in His Letters,” 71ff.

23) As seen earlier, this word of wisdom is given as a momentary revelation, so it could be that the Spirit proclaims the content of wisdom momentarily. In this sense, Dunn understands the word of wisdom as follows: “It probably means simply some charismatic utterance giving an insight into, some fresh understanding of God’s plan of salvation or of the benefits it brings to believers.” Here, Dunn’s insight is evident. By calling the word of wisdom a “charismatic utterance,” he views the nature of this gift as a direct revelation of the Holy Spirit, encompassing the content of wisdom, including the benefits of salvation. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 220.

concept of divine wisdom is fundamentally the gospel proclaimed through the cross. Paul rarely mentions wisdom related to everyday life, focusing instead on how the “word of wisdom” pertains to matters of faith.

Third, there is a fundamental difference between the “word of wisdom” Paul describes and the wisdom of the Old Testament. Further, a significant difference between Paul’s wisdom and the wisdom described in Proverbs is the so-called ‘Holy Spirit factor.’ Proverbs does not incorporate the Holy Spirit factor. In contrast, in 1 Corinthians, God’s wisdom is revealed to believers through the Holy Spirit (διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος) (1 Cor. 2:10). Moreover, the “word of wisdom” is given through a sudden revelation of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8). In the Old Testament, a person who possesses wisdom (e.g., Solomon) acts wisely (1 Kings 3:9-12). In contrast, the “word of wisdom” involves a person receiving wisdom through the Holy Spirit and speaking wise words under the sovereign influence of the Spirit, irrespective of their existing wisdom in a particular field. While Old Testament wisdom involves wise individuals speaking wisdom, Paul’s “word of wisdom” is given momentarily through the Holy Spirit’s revelation to those who have received the Spirit.

3. In the Corinthian Context

In the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14, and considering the situation in the Corinthian church, is the “word of wisdom” characterized by sudden revelation? I am convinced that it is.

3.1. The Issues

24) Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the Old Testament,” *ABD*, 6: 920.

1 Corinthians itself indicates divisions and factions within the Corinthian church. There were “divisions” (σχίσματα) and “quarrels” among the members (1 Cor. 1:10, 11). The Corinthians identified themselves by following different leaders or Christ, saying things like, “I belong to Paul,” “I belong to Apollos,” “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ” (1:12). Paul viewed these divisions seriously and reproached the Corinthians for them (1:13). He also pointed out that the presence of “jealousy and quarrels” indicated that such believers were spiritually immature, like infants (3:2-3). Regardless of the role one takes in ministry, it is not the role itself that matters, but instead that it is God who works through it. Therefore, Paul insists that there should be no divisions within the church over roles or ministries (3:4-9).

Our primary concern is whether the divisions and disputes within the Corinthian church also affected the issues related to spiritual gifts. Although this issue can only be speculative, some indications support this view. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul explains the church using the metaphor of the body, stating that the body should be free from dissension (σχίσμα) (12:25). It is noteworthy that the term “σχίσμα” used in 1:10 to describe the divisions in the Corinthian church is also used here. Paul hopes that there will be no divisions regarding spiritual gifts in the church.

What were the specific issues or divisions related to spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church? Or what problems might have led to the possibility of division? Scholars have proposed various answers to this question. Most solutions suggest that problems arose due to some members of the Corinthian church placing excessive emphasis on speaking in tongues, and Paul’s aim was to counteract this.²⁵⁾ There were issues of order in worship with-

25) E. g., John Coolidge Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 189; F. W. Beare, “Speaking with Tongues: A Critical

in the Corinthian church. Paul addresses these issues extensively in 1 Corinthians 14, especially from verses 26-40.

Additionally, it is assumed that some members may have prioritized supernatural and visible gifts over others. These individuals can be identified as the elitists in the church, categorized as eyes or heads, in contrast to those seen as hands or feet. Paul's statement, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor. 12:21), reflects this dynamic.

1 Corinthians 12-14 provides Paul's solutions to these two issues. Generally speaking, chapters 12-14 address the second issue, while chapter 14 deals with the first issue. The problem of the nine manifestations of the Spirit, including the word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8-10), is also mentioned while addressing the second issue. In the following, we will explore the nature of the word of wisdom in the context of these issues and the situation in the Corinthian church.

3.2. Paul's Solutions

3.2.1. Addressing the Issue of Spiritual Elitism

It is presumed that within the Corinthian church, there were individuals who placed a higher value on visible and supernatural gifts than non-visible and natural gifts. These individuals likely regarded speaking in tongues as surpassing human speech, considering it to be "the language of angels" (13:1), and viewed prophecy, supernatural knowledge, and supernatural faith as more important than general talents or gifts (13:2). We might refer to these individuals as "spiritual elitists."

Paul addresses this issue delicately throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14. He refers to these supernatural gifts as “spiritual things.” The Corinthians were eager to pursue these gifts (14:12). Paul does not rebuke them for their desire but instead encourages them to “strive to excel in them for building up the church” (14:12). Paul himself, as one who practices these gifts, including speaking in tongues, advises them accordingly (14:18). Rather than dismissing their thoughts entirely, Paul seeks to correct some aspects of their views.

Firstly, Paul acknowledges the nature and usefulness of the spiritual gifts that the Corinthians were eager to pursue. He uses the term “πνευματικά” (12:1; 14:1) that they were familiar with and describes these gifts as manifestations of the Spirit (12:7), listing nine examples (12:8-10). It is important to note that these nine examples are not a complete list of manifestations but representative instances. The critical point is that these nine manifestations are all categorized as “πνευματικά” and are described as manifestations of the Spirit, sharing the exact nature.

Grudem suggests that within the Corinthian church there were factions favoring supernatural gifts versus natural gifts, and Paul sought to reconcile these factions by listing both types of gifts side by side in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. According to Grudem, words of wisdom and knowledge fall under natural gifts, while prophecy and tongues represent supernatural gifts.²⁶⁾ However, this interpretation misrepresents Paul’s argument. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 deals specifically with “spiritual gifts,” and chapters 13-14 addresses natural talents or gifts.

Secondly, Paul corrects the spiritual elitists within the Corinthian church. Using the analogy of the body, Paul explains that no part of the body can be an elitist, and every part has its role. Even parts that seem less important are essential and must be supported by other parts so that the body functions

26) Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 300-302.

as a whole (12:12-30). Before this discussion, Paul introduces the term “gifts” (12:4) to indicate that spiritual gifts are just one category among various gifts from God, including natural talents, offices, and missions. All these gifts are given by God’s grace, with spiritual gifts being one among many.

Thirdly, Paul instructs the spiritual elitists to recognize not only their own spiritual gifts but also other gifts and talents given by God. (1) Paul illustrates the futility of gifts without love by mentioning both supernatural and natural gifts, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith (13:1-2), and rational decisions like sacrificial spirit (13:3). (2) In prayer, Paul acknowledges both spiritual prayers like speaking in tongues and rational prayers (14:14-16). (3) Concluding the discussion on spiritual matters, Paul advises pursuing supernatural gifts like prophecy and tongues (14:39) while also emphasizing rational and orderly conduct (14:40).

In summary, Paul’s solution to the spiritual elitists’ views involves affirming their recognition of spiritual gifts and correcting them by acknowledging that all gifts-including rational abilities, talents, and roles-are from God. When Paul presents the “word of wisdom,” he does so in the context of recognizing spiritual gifts, indicating that this gift is a part of the supernatural gifts.

3.2.2. Resolving the Issue of Order in Worship

When Paul discusses spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it is crucial to consider the fundamental conflicts within the Corinthian church. However, interpreting this section requires more than just acknowledging this context. As D. A. Carson correctly points out, “the dominant focus of these chapters [1 Cor. 12-14] is the conduct of the church as it is assembled together.”²⁷⁾

The larger context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 addresses issues arising during worship in the Corinthian church. Specifically, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 14:26-40 deal with occurrences in charismatic worship. In my previous research, I identified the issues in the Corinthian church: “There was disorder in the exercise of spiritual gifts during worship (14:26-32).” “There were occurrences where tongues were spoken without interpretation, providing no benefit to anyone (14:6-15).”²⁸⁾

In this context, Paul presents that worship in the Corinthian church should include both charismatic elements (manifestations of the Spirit) and non-charismatic elements (teaching) (14:26). He also states that both spiritual and rational prayers are necessary (14:14-15). The “word of wisdom” mentioned here is not about proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers or offering wise words in everyday life among Christians. Instead, it is given for the upbuilding of the community during worship. In the worship context, both spiritual gifts and teaching (rational activities) are included.

A question remains: Where does the word of wisdom fit among the categories of teaching and charismatic gifts like tongues/tongue interpretation/prophecy mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and following? Many scholars view the word of wisdom, along with the word of knowledge, as rational speech expressing God’s wisdom.²⁹⁾ However, this perspective arises from confusing God’s wisdom with the word of wisdom. In 1 Corinthians, God’s wisdom refers to understanding the essence of the gospel through the Spirit. In contrast, the word of wisdom is an utterance of wisdom through sudden revelation by the

27) Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 19.

28) 김동수, 『방언은 고귀한 하늘의 언어』 (개정판; 서울: 이레서원, 2012), 201-202.

29) Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 466; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 581.

Spirit. In summary, the “word of wisdom” falls under charismatic gifts, and Paul saw this as part of the worship alongside non-charismatic elements.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This paper attempted to define the nature of Paul’s “word of wisdom” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8. The debate centers on whether this refers to acquired wise speech or to something arising from sudden revelation. The former can be considered natural wisdom, while the latter is considered supernatural wisdom.

Firstly, we have demonstrated that in terms of “spiritual matters,” this wisdom has a supernatural aspect, and in terms of “manifestations of the Spirit,” it possesses the characteristic of sudden revelation. Secondly, considering the context of 1 Corinthians and the circumstances of the Corinthian church, we found that the nature of the word of wisdom aligns with the characteristics of supernatural, sudden wisdom.

What is remarkable about this kind of revelatory speech is that it allows ordinary believers, rather than just those traditionally recognized as wise, to speak with wisdom through the work of the Spirit. This aligns with Luke’s theology of the “universal prophetic office” (Acts 2:16-18), where anyone can speak wisdom momentarily when the Spirit is manifested. This kind of supernatural revelation builds up the church.

Such gifts seem unfamiliar to modern Westerners or modernized Easterners whom Enlightenment ideas have influenced. Many western scholars have equated this gift with acquired wisdom. However, in cultures influenced by shamanistic practices, particularly in ritualistic contexts, speaking with wisdom

through direct revelation is quite common. While Japanese, influenced by German Enlightenment ideas, might find such concepts foreign, it is natural for Koreans, where shamans commonly speak wisdom and knowledge. This cultural background may explain why Korean Christians more readily accept the supernatural workings of the Spirit as described in the Scripture, in contrast to Westerners and Japanese who might not.

<Key Words>

the word of wisdom, wisdom, 1 Corinthians, Paul, sudden revelation view, wise speech view

<주요어>

지혜의 말씀, 지혜, 고린도전서, 바울, 순간적인 계시론, 지혜로운 말하기론

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<Abstract>

The Word of Wisdom(1 Cor. 12:8) in Context

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The “word of wisdom” is the first gift listed by Paul in the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10), but it has not received as much attention compared to the gifts of tongues and prophecy mentioned later. This is surprising, given that Paul emphasizes the importance of wisdom in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians. Historically, scholars have focused more on the concept of wisdom itself, or the wisdom of God and its religious background than on the word of wisdom. However, from the late 20th century onwards, New Testament scholars, both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal, began to debate the nature of the word of wisdom. The central question was whether this wisdom referred to the wisdom Paul discusses in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians or if it referred to a new, distinct spiritual gift. Wayne A. Grudem termed the former view the “wise speech view” and the latter the “sudden revelation view,” with many scholars, including Grudem, supporting the former. This paper challenges the majority view. Based on the theological terms Paul uses to describe this gift, I argue that it refers to a sudden, revelatory wisdom. Furthermore, in the context where some Corinthians were falling into spiritual elitism, Paul acknowledges both charismatic, supernatural gifts and rational, natural gifts to encourage unity in the Corinthian church, positioning the word of wisdom as a charismatic gift. Although this study does not present an entirely new conclusion about the word of wisdom, it offers a fresh exegetical and theological examination and reaches a rational conclusion.

<초록>

정황으로 살펴본 지혜의 말씀(고전 12:8)

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지혜의 말씀은 바울이 성령의 은사 목록을 제시하면서(고전 12:8-10) 첫 번째 열거한 은사인데, 후에 나오는 방언이나 예언의 은사에 비해서 주목 받지 못했다. 하지만, 바울이 고린도전서 첫 세 장에서 지혜를 중요하게 취급했음을 볼 때 이러한 상황은 다소 의외다. 그동안 학자들은 고린도전서에서 지혜의 말씀보다도 지혜, 혹은 하나님의 지혜 자체와 그 종교적 배경에 대해서 주로 관심을 기울였고, 정작 지혜의 말씀에 대해서는 큰 관심을 기울이지 않았던 것이다. 하지만, 오순절/비오순절 계열의 신약학자들에 의해 20세기 후반부터 지혜의 말씀에 관한 논쟁이 시작되었고, 그 논점은 이 지혜가 바울이 고린도전서 첫 3장에서 말하는 지혜를 지칭하는 것이냐 혹은 그것과 연관은 있지만 새로운 개념의 은사를 지칭하느냐 하는 것이었다. 그루뎀(Wayne A. Grudem)은 전자를 지지하는 의견을 지혜로운 말하기론(wise speech view)이라고 하고, 후자를 지지하는 의견을 순간적인 계시론(sudden revelation view)이라고 지칭했다. 그루뎀을 비롯한 많은 학자들은 전자를 지지한다. 본 논문은 이러한 주류의 견해를 반박하는 것이다. 논자는 바울이 이 은사를 지칭할 때 사용하는 신학적 용어들을 볼 때 이것이 순간적인 계시적 지혜를 말하는 것이라고 주장했다. 또 고린도 교인 일부가 영적 엘리트주의에 빠져 있는 상황에서, 바울이 카리스마적인 초자연적인 은사와 이성적인 자연적인 은사를 모두 인정하면서 고린도 교회의 하나됨을 권면하는데, 바울은 지혜의 말씀을 카리스마적 은사로 분류한다. 본 연구는 지혜의 말씀에 대한 완전히 새로운 결론을 제시하는 것은 아니지만, 이것을 새롭게 주석적, 신학적으로 고찰하여 합리적 결론에 도달했다는 데 그 의미가 있다.