

Women's Bible Study
Winter 2012
1st Corinthians

Author: the apostle Paul

Written from Ephesus towards the end of Paul's 3rd missionary journey (somewhere in the realm of AD 53-55)

Background → the city of Corinth

- Destroyed by Rome in 146 BC
- Re-established as a Roman colony in 44BC
- Strategically located near an isthmus between the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas (allowed sailors to drag boats across a small strip of land rather than sailing a considerable extra distance around the southern coastline of Greece) →
 - flourishing, prominent → in Paul's day, probably the wealthiest city in Greece and a major, multicultural center
- Place where many religions and cultures mixed
 - Roman influence – laws and customs
 - Greek influence – plethora of mythical and/or pagan gods (temples to Aphrodite, Poseidon, Asklepios (Greek god of healing) etc. The worship of these gods was fully integrated into governmental affairs, civic festivals, and everyday life in general.

Background → the Church of Corinth

- Planted by Paul on his second missionary journey in the early 50s AD
- Small Jewish presence but the majority of the church, like the majority of the community, would have come from Gentile and pagan backgrounds of numerous cultures
- Bulk of the church were probably ordinary tradesmen and workers
 - However, a minority of affluent and socially elite were also present who exercised an influence out of proportion to their numbers and seemed to be behind a larger percentage of the problems the church in Corinth was facing

Background → Occasion for the letter

- Divisions in the Church, particularly surrounding leadership
- Snobbery → a church enamored with position and social privilege...a flowing over into the church of a surrounding culture that valued social status and privilege - led to a perpetuation of class distinctions
- Many in the church had failed to break away from the pervading cultural influences of their day and were still falling prey to immorality

Relevance to Today

- Divisions in the Church →
 - Preferences, leadership styles, "I want it my way"
 - The ordering of Church practices (i.e. the Lord's supper) and the exercise of Spiritual Gifts
 - Denominationalism – does it have a place?
- Resisting the temptation to follow a popular leader rather than Christ
- Principles of secular leadership and standards of "success" flowing over into the church →
 - Success based on "profit and loss" and membership rosters vs. obedience to God.
 - Giving preferential treatment to those with wealth/social status

- How do we deal with the overflow of culture into the church?
 - Dealing with issues of immorality, the assertion of personal “rights”, etc.
 - Avoiding a faith that’s a mile wide and an inch deep →
 - the need for emphasis on growth and spiritual maturity, sanctification – the faith that TRANSFORMS;
 - Stressing relationship and intimacy with God
 - Resisting privatized Christianity → relegating our faith to personal quiet times and church activities but having little to no effect on the public arena, the workplace
 - Avoiding the response of “Legalism” and a “Religious Spirit” → setting up legalistic requirements in response to culture

- The importance of sound, biblical doctrine
 - In addressing issues of culture
 - In addressing Church practices
 - In addressing the non-negotiables of faith – such as the Resurrection

OUTLINE of 1st Corinthians (from the ESV study Bible and NIV Application Commentary)

- I. Introduction
 - a. Greetings and intro to letter’s main themes

- II. Divisions over Christian Preachers
 - a. God’s wisdom answers the problem

- III. Paul Addresses Reports of Sexual Immorality and Legal Issues
 - a. Incest, arrogance and the need for discipline
 - b. Lawsuits among believers
 - c. The seriousness of sexual immorality in general

- IV. Paul Responds to Three Issues from a Corinthian Letter
 - a. Marriage, divorce and unchangeable circumstances
 - b. The engaged and widows
 - c. Food offered to idols

- V. Divisions over Corporate Worship
 - a. Head coverings and worship
 - b. Social snobbery at the Lord’s Table
 - c. Spiritual Gifts in action

- VI. The Futility of Faith without the Resurrection
 - a. The certainty of Christ’s Resurrection
 - b. Christ’s Resurrection and the resurrection of believers
 - c. The nature of the resurrection body

- VII. Travel Plans and Final Greetings

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

***“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes”
(vs.1)***

- Vs.1: Paul identifies himself as one “called” to be an apostle of Christ Jesus “by the will of God”
 - Establishing authority from the get-go. Why is this important? Paul is going to be a heavy hitter in this letter – wants to make it clear that his calling and his authority come from God Himself – therefore it is right and fitting that Paul address these issues and that the people respond appropriately
 - Sosthenes → nothing more is said; probably a Christian brother accompanying Paul at the time of the letter’s composition

“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (vs. 2-3)

- Vs. 2: Paul is setting the tone of the letter in the greeting; already, 2 major themes are emerging:
 - **Sanctification** → the letter is to those “sanctified”(separated apart for God) and “called to be holy” → you’re meant to look different from the world. You were called to be **holy**
 - Sanctified = **hagiazō** → from the root word “hagios” → holy
 - Holy = **hagios** → “Something holy is that which has been brought into relationship with God and designated by Him as having a sacred purpose or special significance to Him”
 - Formally: “**outwardly** holy – identified or marked as holy, classified as belonging to God or of special interest to Him; sacred, consecrated”
 - Materially: “sanctified **inwardly**, holy in nature and disposition, godly, devout, pious. Describes one whose moral and spiritual character bears the image of God”
 - Those who are sanctified materially (inwardly)are certainly also sanctified formally (outwardly)
 - **Unity** → “to **all those everywhere** who call on the name of our Lord **Jesus** Christ – **their Lord and ours**” →
 - He is their Lord, He is our Lord – we all have the same goal here
 - Get back to the basics - Jesus is our only sticking point; He is our unifying factor; because He is Lord over us all, we should seek unity and not give way to divisiveness

“I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful”
(vs. 4-9)

- How can Paul be so positive and thankful about a church that is rife with division and abuse of the gifts?

- He saw the good that was happening – he started out by focusing on what was going RIGHT in the church!
- The presence of the gifts is evidence that the Spirit is there and at work – they haven't got it dialed in yet but God's working!
- Paul is thankful for the Corinthian church... and we should be thankful in spite of the bumps and bruises we may experience as a church while God is conforming us in to the likeness of His Son because... "You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed..."
 - God has made sure that we have all that we need to grow, both individually and corporately
 - This clause strongly suggests that all the spiritual gifts will last until Jesus comes back. We should be faithfully exercising all the gifts until Jesus returns

"Fellowships that err on the side of over-exercise and misuse of their gifts and talents are less displeasing to God than those that err on the side of underuse. Immature but growing children delight their parents far more than those who simply refuse to mature in some areas of their lives"
- We will be still trying to dial it in until Jesus comes back...but ultimately, Paul knew that God's character provides the guarantee (vs 8- 9) –
 - We won't always get it right – we will make mistakes but Christ will keep us strong and present us blameless on the day He returns.
 - Paul's thankfulness for the church at Corinth was based on the truth that God is faithful!!
 - the Corinthian church might be immature and chaotic but God who had called them into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ would be faithful to complete the good work He had started in them (see also Philippians 1:6)... ***and He will be faithful to finish the good work He has begun in you!***
 - ***God is about the business of perfecting Christ's church, both individually and corporately!***

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."

(Vs. 10-17)

- The problem: rival factions, divisions among the people based on their ascribing to certain leaders
- The solution: UNITY! Quit looking to man and look to Christ
- I appeal to you “in the name of Jesus” → this is serious! In the power and authority of who Jesus is, I beg you to set these disagreements aside and **refuse to be divided**
- Goal was “no divisions” and for the people to be “perfectly united (restored to unity) in mind and thought”
 - Mind = **nous** → the seat of emotions and affections; way of thinking and feeling; attitude, moral inclination – includes the idea of “counsel”
 - Thought = **gnome** → discernment which determines conduct – includes the idea of “choice”
 - To be unified in mind and thought then involves both “cognition” (how the mind thinks about something) and “volition” (how I choose to process the information and act on it)
 - Paul’s goal for the Corinthians then was to be restored to unity in how they thought about things and how they acted on what they were thinking about!
- What are they divided about? People were quarreling because they were aligning themselves with different Christian leaders ☹️
 - There’s no evidence in scripture that the *leaders* were promoting this and
 - the reasons for the rival alignments are not clear from scripture either
 - Paul doesn’t align himself with any faction but is after whatever it takes to dispel disunity and create harmony
- Paul’s reply involves 3 rhetorical questions all implying the answer “NO”:
 - Christ is not divided so how can his people be?
 - Neither Paul nor any other human leader was crucified for the world so how can a mere, human authority be exalted?
 - Christian baptism is in the name of JESUS (implying power and authority) – no human leader can claim the same
- Paul’s paraphrase, “are you stupid??! This should be a no-brainer!!”
- The key for promoting unity and avoiding divisiveness – focusing on Christ rather than exalting human leaders. Focus on Christ leads to a focus on the cross, which should always prompt humility rather than arrogance or rivalry.
- **The disunity of the Church of Jesus Christ remains one of its greatest scandals and continues to compromise its witness today.**

“When will the institutional church, and particularly the church in the individualized West, put away its petty squabbling and begin to demonstrate this biblically mandated unity more visibly?? Not a few unbelievers ancient and modern have rejected the gospel on the grounds that a religion as visibly divided as Christianity could scarcely reflect the truth!”

- “Divisions over matters not fundamental to preserving the true gospel of Jesus must be lovingly but firmly dissipated”

- Know what the “bulls-eye” issues are and learn to compromise on the rest!
- What are some of the issues dividing the church today?
 - Views on baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the millennium or rapture, women in ministry, spiritual gifts, worship styles
- What should be our bulls-eye issues??
 - Salvation thru Christ and Christ alone
 - The Bible is the inerrant word of God
 - Love the Lord your God with all that you have and love your neighbor as yourself
- What are some ways we can compromise preference and not compromise truth in order to promote unity in both the little “c” church and the big “C” church?

READ 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

- In vs. 18-25 Paul sets out the contrast between God’s wisdom and the wisdom of the world;
- In 1:26-2:5 Paul vigorously re-affirms that JESUS is our only sticking point and the cross and all it represents is where our focus needs to be

***“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”
(vs.18)***
- Verse 18 is the thesis statement for this section of the letter. There are only two categories of people in this world – those who are in the process of being saved and those who are in the process of perishing.
 - To those who are perishing, those who have not accepted the truth of the gospel, the idea of Jesus dying on a cross for the sins of the world is ridiculous
 - But to those who are being saved, the cross is the chief example of God’s wisdom and power.

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who **believe.
(vs. 20-21)**

- Salvation takes a faith transaction!! The world in its wisdom, intellect, and reasoning cannot know Him.
- Paul isn’t saying “don’t use your mind” – you can pick up any book on Christian apologetics and see that there is great historical, archeological and even scientific evidence to validate the Christian faith...but there will come a point where faith must override reason.

- You won't be able to explain everything because you weren't meant to – God purposed the need for a FAITH TRANSACTION!!
- Paul's not against intellectualism – he's against the wisdom of the WORLD and trying to apply the wisdom of this age to things that can only be understood in the spirit thru GOD'S wisdom

***"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the **power** of God and the **wisdom** of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."
(vs. 22-25)***

- A stumbling block to Jews...a crucified Messiah was not in their script! They wanted a political savior and super-power NOT a servant leader. They wanted to see the power of God show up in miraculous signs not in gentle, self-sacrificing humility
- Foolishness to Gentiles...where was the "wisdom" or "reason" behind such an event? What's wise or reasonable about a crucified Savior??
- Bottom line → upside down kingdom! God does things differently ON PURPOSE – why?? So it would require FAITH...and there would be no doubt in anyone's mind that GOD was the one accomplishing this great salvation and NOT us!

***"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.
(vs. 26-29)***

- God leaves us no room to figure it out on our own or to wrestle it out in our own strength. He does it completely upside down and backwards so there's no way a human being could take credit for it...it's a GOD-THING and we cannot boast!

***It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has **become for us** wisdom from God—that is, our **righteousness, holiness and redemption**. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.
(vs. 30-31)***

- This is the wisdom of **GOD** – Jesus has become **FOR** us righteousness, holiness and redemption
 - Wisdom of God = **Sophia** → "divine wisdom", includes the ideas of **infinite** skill, insight, knowledge and purity
 - God knew exactly what he was doing!! This wasn't a "plan B"!

- Righteousness = **dikaiosyne** → from **diakaios** → “just, righteous, upright, describes one who acts conformably to justice and what is right without any deficiency or failure”
 - **Dikaiosyne** → righteousness → “conformity to the claims of higher authority – the standards set by God Himself”
 - Jesus has become **my** righteousness – He is and does what is right and in alignment with who God is...and He does it without any deficiency or failure. He includes me in THAT- hallelujah!
- Holiness = **hagiasmos** → the “os” on the end indicates an **action** rather than a quality or attribute
 - The “making of” something holy – what **Christ** has done **for** us! (we are already “made holy” in Christ)
 - “Holy living or conduct, as that which conforms to God’s character” – we respond in **action** to what Christ has **done** for us
- Redemption = **apolytroisis** → “to release on payment of ransom” – liberation...the rescuing of captives (sinners) from captivity (sin) through the payment of a ransom for them (Jesus’ death on the cross)
 - We are free! We are no longer held captive, bound to our sins. We have a new life in Christ that makes dumping the old life of sin possible
- THEREFORE, let him who boasts, boast in the LORD!! Don’t put your faith or your confidence or your allegiance in ANY man (including yourself) – only Christ!!

*“The cross thus stands as the final negation of all human attempts to attain God. Its truth cannot be **achieved** through the best of human intellect and strength but must be **received** as a gift in the humble submission of faith and trust”*
 (John Polhill)

“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”
 (2:1-2)

- Not that Paul didn’t teach anything else but that the cross was the central focus of Paul’s preaching

I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”
 (2:3-5)

- I want to be more than mouth as I minister...talk is cheap! Don’t tell me, show me that there’s something different about this Jesus.

- The world needs to see that JESUS WORKS...yes, in the miraculous...I want him to show up as we minister today the same way he showed up 2000 years ago...but also in the mundane, the day to day grind
- Is a relationship with Jesus transforming how I do relationship with people? How I approach my work? How I relate to my husband and children? How I care for the poor? The Spirit will always show up in FRUIT before He shows up in the miraculous! The Fruit of the Spirit IS the miraculous!!
- This verse also puts apologetics in its appropriate place. Yes, we need to be formulating thoughtful, intelligent responses to people when they have questions about our faith.
 - BUT only the convicting work of the Holy Spirit **convinces**...HE must do the work of convincing them of truth – not us

READ 1 Corinthians 2:6-10a

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

***"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" –***

***but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.
(2:6-10a)***

- As believers in Jesus, we DO have something to say! We have a message of wisdom but not one that's going to line up with what's trendy or politically correct or culturally sensitive to the current world viewpoint
- God's "secret wisdom" was that Jesus has been the plan since before time began. The world in its wisdom couldn't get it...but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit

"The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us."
(vs.10a-12)

- The Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God...and this is the very spirit that has come to take up residence in each one of us.
 - The significance of that?? We CAN know the thoughts of God!! God reveals Himself to us through His Spirit
 - His intent is that we will UNDERSTAND what He has freely given us in this

great salvation He has provided through Christ

***"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.
(2:13-14)***

- Paul is stating that the gospel message they bring doesn't come via human wisdom – it's directly from God through His Holy Spirit. Only someone who has received Christ as Savior and has the Spirit of God within can understand spiritual truths
- It's about more than an "intellectual understanding"...it's a knowing, a transaction that transforms. Many people can read the bible and essentially understand what it says ~ they have "cognition"...but no "volition"...no understanding in their spirit that leads to transformation. They can understand "facts" but not understand the deeper spiritual truth that's meant to transform them – it doesn't penetrate from their head to their heart
- Gives me patience when dealing with unbelievers when I realize that it's not just a matter of them *not wanting* to understand – they **can't** understand. Spiritual truths don't make sense to them.
 - I need to lower my expectations of those who don't believe...I find myself becoming disappointed with co-workers, for example...I have to remember that they don't have the perspective of the Spirit. I want to see the Fruit of the Spirit in them and that's not realistic. They don't know any different than what the world feeds them so why am I surprised at certain behaviors or attitudes??
- Also a good reminder to believers...sometimes we want our "minds" to understand things that only the "spirit" can discern. Again, there comes a point where we have to set our ability to "reason it out" aside and just BELIEVE

***"The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:
'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?'
But we have the mind of Christ"
(2:15-16)***

- The spiritual man makes judgments about all things simply means that "believers have the ability to bring God's perspective to bear on every aspect of life"
- Verse 15b means that Christians aren't subject to any **merely** human evaluation - one that doesn't take God's perspective into account. Ultimately, God is the only judge that counts

- Later in the book Paul does talk about holding other believers accountable...here he is mainly talking about believers being unjustly evaluated by non-Christians or Christians applying worldly standards
- ***"But we have the mind of Christ"...***
 - Paul, the most immature Corinthian believer, and every believer all share:
 - An ability to commune with God, to understand His will, and make sense of the foundational truths of scripture