

The World's vs. God's Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:14-2:16)

Expository Lessons from the Book of 1 Corinthians

I. Recap of Last Lesson and Introduction

a. Why study 1 Corinthians?

- i. The book is diverse and practical. Hits real challenges faced by the Corinthian church, and are applicable to us today as well.
- ii. Corinth was a cosmopolitan church, people from all sorts of pagan and Gentile backgrounds converted, bringing in ungodly thinking and worldly practices into the church. This is a common problem for us today if we live in a cosmopolitan church with people becoming Christians from all types of backgrounds. What can we learn from Paul and his letter to the Corinthians?

b. Paul's great challenge

- i. Paul recognizes that there are many problems in the church. These include:
 1. Disunity,
 2. Christians committing sexual immorality,
 3. Christians turning to the courts of the world to resolve conflict,
 4. misunderstanding about sex, marriage and being single,
 5. disagreement surrounding idolatry and eating food that had been sacrificed to idols,
 6. issues around covering and uncovering one's head when a Christian sister or brother prays or prophesies,
 7. problems regarding the role of women in the church,
 8. problems regarding the communion,
 9. problems around spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues, and
 10. false teaching on the resurrection of the body.
- ii. These were issues of the Christians' behavior, conduct, and doctrine. Their conduct revealed the Corinthians' misunderstanding of God and the word of God, including Christ's teachings. The church is in a bad place!

iii. Paul has a great challenge.

1. Read **Ephesians 5:25-27**. Paul deeply loves the church. He had Jesus' heart to present the church in Corinth as "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."
 2. Yet, how does Paul write a letter to address all of these issues? Will they not be offended? Many issues to correct and set straight! Who wants to write a letter like this? Much easier to pretend everything is fine.
 3. Paul was determined to help the church go from point A (where the Church was) to point B (a spotless bride). How does Paul do this?
- c. Paul's response to the church in Corinth provides lessons for us when we need to correct each other as Christians.
- i. Paul's heart of love
 1. Read **2 Cor. 1:23-2:4** (written later to the church in Corinth)
 - a. He did not want to cause them sorrow, wanted them to be joyful! (In fact, he stayed away from Corinth as he didn't want to bring them more sorrow, wanted to give them time to repent.)
 - b. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." (**2 Cor. 2:4**)
 - c. Started the church (**Acts 18**) and spent 18 months with them. Has a relationship with them.
 2. Read **2 Cor. 3:1-3**
 - a. "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."
 3. Paul loves the church enough to address these issues with them.

- a. "...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ..."
(**Ephesians 4:14-15**, ESV)
 - ii. Paul recognizes an openness in the Church.
 1. There are times when a person or group of people were so hardened, so unresponsive, that Paul moved on. (See **Acts 13:44** when Paul turned away from the Jews, filled with envy and opposition to the word of God, to take the gospel to the Gentiles who were eager to embrace it!)
 2. Despite their many problems, the church in Corinth was open to input. They had written Paul to ask about many of these issues, seeking his direction. His letter is a response to their letter to him:
 - a. "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me....(**1 Cor. 7:1**),
 - b. Now about food sacrificed to idols.... (**8:1**),
 - c. Now about spiritual gifts.... (**12:1**)
 - d. Now about the collection.... (**16:1**),
 - e. Now about our brother Apollos.... (**16:12**)
 3. The church in Corinth is asking for advice. They (or at least some!) are exhibiting humility of seeking input. And we can read in **2 Corinthians 7**, of the church's repentance, which is really encouraging!
 - iii. Paul's proper understanding of correction.
 1. **Prov. 12:1** (NKJV) "He who loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid...."
 2. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."
 - a. While a helpful principle for non-Christians, this directive is actually directed to Christians!

- b. My experience in law school with Prof. O'Connell's 10-pages of correction on my 10-page paper! Only one way to become a good lawyer is to be taught how.
- c. How do we respond to being corrected as Christians? On life, behavior, doctrine? Paul had no problem with this.
- iv. Paul's ability to persuade. Paul uses analogies, reason, logic, emotion, Old Testament examples and Scripture, Jesus. Putting in such great effort in his letter to win the church to Christ.
- v. Before he gets into specific teaching on specific issues in his letter, Paul lays out several foundational principles, the groundwork for everything else. If get these foundational things right, the specifics of the various issues will be much easier to understand and make sense. These foundational principles are what we will focus on today.

II. We are Not Following Men, but Christ

- a. Read **1 Cor. 1:11-17**
- b. The church is lining up around spiritual leaders
 - i. "'I am of Apollos' or 'I am of Cephas' or 'I am of Christ.'" (**1 Cor. 1:12-13**)
 - ii. These were spiritual men (Paul, Peter, Apollos). But people were focusing on the church leader, rather than on Jesus. (They seem to have lost sight of the fact that Paul, Peter, and Apollos would not have put up with their practices!)
 - iii. This has always been a problem with God's people – wanting to put trust in a human leader, rather than in God.
 - 1. In **1 Samuel 8:4-8** Israel asks for a king to be appointed to lead them "like all the rest of the nations". Samuel recognizes this is evil and prays to God. God tells Samuel: "[the people] have not rejected you, but rather they have rejected Me, to bring to naught My reign over them."
 - 2. This seems to be the problem with the church in Corinth. Want to identify with and follow men, rather than identifying with and following Jesus. This leads to worldliness. Taking our eyes off of Christ and throwing off his commands, Jesus' "reign" over His church.
 - 3. **1 Cor. 1:13-17** People identifying with the people who were baptizing them, rather than identifying with Christ.

- a. Paul asks: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (**v. 13**) Answer: No!
- b. Paul is astounded. Says while he baptized several people, he is glad he did not baptize any others. Then says: "I did not come to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (**v. 17**)
 - i. Some suggest this passage proves that Paul did not believe in baptism. That conclusion does not make any sense.
 - ii. Jesus taught that we must be born again of the water and the Spirit to enter into the Kingdom of God. (**John 3**)
 - iii. Paul was baptized (**Acts 22**) and taught baptism for the forgiveness of sins (**Romans 6:4, Ephesians 4:5, Colossians 2:11-12**).
 - iv. Paul baptized Gaius, Crispus, and household of Stephanas (**1 Cor. 1:14-16**).
 - v. Context of the passage: you are identifying with who baptizes, rather than with Christ. This is causing division. Yes, baptize. But remember it is into Christ that you are baptized.
- c. **1 Cor. 1:17** "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."
 - i. Important that we understand what God means when He says something in His word. The meanings of words are important.
 - ii. "Garden" had two different meanings for my wife Eva and me. Eva wanted to plant a garden during law school. I felt this was very insensitive! My parents' garden growing up was huge. It would cover most of our lot without our house. Eva's idea was a few one-yard-by-one-yard boxes! We had very different understandings when we heard the word "garden" and it made a big difference!
 - iii. Two important words: "Christ" and "gospel"
- d. What does the word "Christ" mean?
 - i. "Christ" = "the anointed one"
 - 1. Saul is referred to as "the Lord's anointed one" (the Greek word "christos" in the LXX), anointed as a king (**1 Samuel 12:3, 5**)

2. Samuel thinks Eliab (David's brother) is the Lord's "anointed one", to be anointed as king (the Greek word "christos" in the LXX) (**1 Samuel 16:6**)
3. God tells Elijah to appoint two kings and to appoint Elisha as a prophet (using the verb form of "christos" in **1 Kings 19:15-16**)
4. It's a title. Like "Doctor Smith".
- ii. We have made "Christ" a proper name for Jesus. Jesus "Christ" (Jesus' last name). But Jesus' followers (and his enemies) would have heard it "Jesus, the Anointed One".
- iii. "Christ" is often used on its own to refer to Jesus, but not a nickname or new name, but a title. Similar to when we see Jesus referred to in the Gospels where Jesus is referred to as "Teacher".
- iv. "Christ" is used 10x in the first 10 verses of **1 Cor. 1**. Why? Could have said "Jesus". Could have said Teacher. Paul uses instead "the anointed one".
- v. Who is the "Christos" that was prophesied about? Read **Psalms 2**.
 1. Rulers of this world would oppose the anointed one ("the Christos") and seek to cast off his rule/yoke (**2:2**)
 2. But, he is **the King (2:6)** who would ultimately rule them, shepherd with an iron staff and shatter them like a potter's vessel.
 3. The anointed one is also **the Son (2:7-8)**, begotten by God, given the nations as his inheritance.
 4. Those who trust in the anointed one (Christos) will be blessed. (2:12)
 5. This is the Anointed One! Prophesied about in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus.
- e. **1 Cor. 1:17** "For Christ (the anointed one) did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."
 - i. "The gospel" = "good news". What is the good news that Paul was proclaiming?
 1. Some will insert "God loves you, Jesus died for your sins, and you are forgiven." This is part of it. But not all of it.

- ii. The message that Paul preached = the Kingdom of God
 - 1. Paul in Rome at the end of this ministry (Read **Acts 28:28-31**)
 - 2. See also Paul in Ephesus (**Acts 19:8-10, 20:17-27**)
- iii. The message of Jesus = the Kingdom of God
 - 1. Read **Matt. 4:15-17, 23**
 - a. The good news is the message of the Kingdom of God. People sat in darkness and have seen a great light. The Kingdom of God has come.
 - 2. Jesus taught in parables (**Matt. 13:10-13**) about the Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom of God is like this": a mustard seed (**13:31**), leaven (**13:33-35**), wheat and weeds (**13:24**), treasure in a field that someone finds (**13:44**), a merchant seeking pearls and finding one sells all he has to buy it (**13:45**), a king who wanted to settle accounts (**18:21**), and a landowner who went and hired labors and paid them the same wage (**20:1**)
- iv. In **1 Cor. 1:17** Paul is saying I have come to preach the Gospel (the good news) of the Kingdom of God, just like Jesus.
 - 1. There's a new Kingdom that's arrived;
 - 2. We have a real king, Jesus, to obey and follow (**Psalms 2**);
 - 3. A new standard of righteousness and way of living (as described in Jesus' commands, including the Sermon of the Mount and the parables); and
 - 4. The way to salvation.
- v. One of the key principles Paul is laying out in the beginning of his letter is that the Church must be loyal to Christ, not any man. Christ is not divided. That the Christians were baptized into the name of the Christ. That Jesus is "the Christos" (the anointed one promised in Scripture), the King, Lord, Son of God who will rule the nations. Not Paul, not Cephas, not Apollos, not any Church leader. He is saying, get this on straight. If you do, it will be much easier to tackle the various issues I will get to later in my letter.
- vi. Lessons for us:
 - 1. Who is our Church leader? (Jesus!)
 - 2. Who do we identify with? (Our little group? Or Jesus?)

3. We must submit ourselves to the reign of the Christos, Jesus. He is our king. He is the Son of God. If we take our eyes off of this, we, like the church in Corinth, will drift and fall into all kinds of sin and confusion, just as they did.
4. A test: look at the fruit of the church you are in. If rampant with sin, most likely the church has taken its sight off of the Anointed One and his rule and instead placed its identity and loyalty in men. Repent!

[End of Part 1 in the Lesson Recording]

III. The Message of the Cross is the Power of God.

- a. Read **1 Cor. 1:17-2:5**
- b. The message of the cross is the power, the fuel of God – it is the oil that makes the Kingdom of God run. (Interesting, Paul does not say the resurrection is the power of God! He will spend significant time on the resurrection at the end of 1 Corinthians.) Certainly the resurrection displays the power of God. But Paul says the cross, the way of suffering, is the power of God.
- c. Despite **Psalm 2**, we also have
 - i. **Psalm 22:1-3, 7-9, 12-23**
 - ii. **Isaiah 53:1-5** – the suffering servant
- d. The message of the cross – that the Christ, the King, the son of God, would suffer and die.
 - i. A stumbling block to the Jews. Cannot except this. **Psalm 2** yes, but not **Psalm 22** or **Isaiah 53**! Moses destroyed the Egyptians. Joshua conquered and led us into the promise land. David conquered the nations and we (Israel) lived in peace. Jesus can't be our promised Messiah and King, hanging on the cross.
 - ii. Foolishness to the Greeks. If you are king, work your power! Alexander the Great – he was a mighty king with armies and authority and power. Show us your power! Not death on a cross.
- e. My son's UMass graduation: 5,000 graduates, students and professors in long black robes with colors representing their various degrees, trumpet fanfare, research centers, labs, towering library.... This represents the wisdom of the world.

- i. Yet, **1 Cor. 1:21** "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."
 - ii. All that wisdom (at UMass), but don't know the Creator of the Universe! How can this be?
 - iii. Someone with dementia, no longer knows their spouse. So incredibly sad, and shocking. How much more that the creation does not know the Creator of the Universe.
 - iv. Wisdom of the world (at UMass): no power to rescue from sin. So much sin – sexual immorality, depression, suicide, violence, drunken debauchery, etc. All in bondage.
 - v. No power to save. No forgiveness in libraries, degrees, prestige.
- f. Wisdom of God = the way of the King, the Anointed One, the Suffering Servant. We learn in this passage that God's wisdom is characterized by several things:
 - i. Different than the wisdom of this age
 - ii. World calls it foolish
 - iii. Despised by most
 - iv. Rulers of this age do not understand
 - v. It is present in human weakness, fear, trembling
 - vi. Provides opportunity for working of the Holy Spirit
- g. Compare to the wisdom of man
 - i. Characterized by wise speech, nobility, human strength and power. Opposite of God's wisdom.
 - ii. Paul's warning: **1 Cor. 1:19** quotes **Isaiah 29:14** - "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Only God's wisdom will remain at the end.
 - iii. Paul's sense of humor: reminds the church they really were not that wise in the eyes of the world! (**1 Corinthians 1:26-2:2**)
- h. Why is this important for the Corinthian Church?
 - i. Not just a message for the world! But to the church.
 - ii. They had become worldly. Thinking like the world. Adopting the ways of the world.
 - iii. Paul will get into the specifics soon – address all these different areas. But now he is laying the foundation: don't think like the world. The

cross of Christ is the wisdom of God. The way of suffering, of weakness, of sacrifice, of love.

- iv. Christians are “little anointed ones”. To follow in Christ's footsteps. If you get this, then you will understand what Paul will tell you later about:
 - 1. Resolving conflict when wronged
 - 2. Understanding the marriage covenant is through good times and bad, only broken at death
 - 3. Denying the flesh, including sexual sins
 - 4. Submitting ourselves to our God-given roles as men and women
 - 5. And other issues and conduct in the church.
- v. The world's wisdom/way of dealing with these issues is very different than the way of the cross, the power of God. We are called to follow the way of the Anointed One, the King, the Son of God, embracing His wisdom in all of our ways.
- vi. Read **2 Corinthians 4:7-12**
 - 1. Paul's life was the way of the cross, God is glorified, God's power made known in weakness and suffering. This is the wisdom Paul wants the Corinthians to know.

IV. The Wisdom of God is Hidden But Revealed by the Spirit

- a. Read **1 Cor. 2:6-3:1**
- b. God's wisdom is “a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew...” (**2:7-8**).
 - i. See also **2 Cor. 4:3-4** “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them....”
 - ii. Sobering! The Gospel of God, the wisdom of God, is hidden, veiled. How will we find it?
- c. “But, God has revealed them [His wisdom] to us through His Spirit” (**2:10**)
 - i. Spirit of God knows the things of God.
 - ii. (Like only a man knows his own spirit, only the Spirit knows the things of God. I don't know what another person is thinking, not even my wife of 23 years.)

- iii. God has “freely given” us His Spirit “that we might know the things of God! (2:12)
- d. “But, the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him....” (2:14) Paul goes on to call the Corinthian Christians “carnal”, not spiritual!
- e. Lesson: we need to repent of being worldly, of the flesh. Seek the wisdom of God. Seek and ask for the Holy Spirit as Jesus instructs us in **Luke 11:13**.

V. Conclusion

- a. Paul is really trying to make his case to the church: “I really love you! I am in anguish for you.” As in **Ephesians 5**, Paul wants to present the church as a spotless bride.
- b. No real nice way to say it: the church in Corinth is worldly.
- c. Lays the groundwork before he gets to the specific issues he needs to address:
 - i. We are not following men, but the anointed one, the King.
 - ii. The power, the fuel of this Kingdom is the cross of Christ, the way of suffering. This will be foolishness to the world, but is the wisdom and power of God.
 - iii. They are acting like the world. They are of the flesh, but the Spirit is trying to reveal to them the wisdom of God. Christ wants to shine on them, as well as on us!
- d. Paul ends by quoting Isaiah. Read **Isaiah 40:9-15**.
 - i. A picture of the almighty God.
 - ii. Who will advise him? Who will contradict him?
 - iii. The nations and their wisdom are but a drop in the bucket, like spit!
 - iv. This is a warning, not to the world, but to God's church.
 - v. May we be warned – easy to latch on to the world's way of thinking. To let the world come into the church. Let's be vigilant.
 - vi. Let us also take great comfort – God has given us his Spirit, to know his ways and his wisdom.
- e. In our next lesson, we'll pick up in **1 Corinthians 3**, where Paul uses four examples from daily life to communicate more about the wisdom of God and building a strong, healthy church.