

# The Two Kinds of Wisdom

(1 Corinthians 3:18-4:21)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

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## I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. Paul was writing to the Corinthian church, addressing a number of problems there that he was aware of, and also answering questions the Christians had raised to him.
- b. Corinth was a wealthy and decadent pagan city in Achaia (southern part of Greece).
- c. Many of the things Paul states in this letter, while consistent with the teachings of other apostles and Jesus, were profoundly counter-cultural in Corinth and in the ancient Roman world.
- d. The very first problem Paul addressed was that of division in the church, based on factions forming with strong veneration of and loyalty to prominent teachers and apostles (with Paul, Peter and Apollos being mentioned by name).
  - i. "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'" (1 Corinthians 1:12, NKJV)
- e. Paul argued that the Christians in Corinth must be unified under Christ rather than dividing out of a sectarian spirit based on identifying with prominent leaders. His reasoning in rebuking their sectarian tendencies included the following:
  - i. Christ is not divided.
  - ii. They were baptized into the name of Christ (not in the name of Paul, nor of other prominent leaders in the church).
  - iii. It was Christ (only) who was crucified for them.
    1. The message of the cross seems like foolishness to the world.
    2. The message of the cross goes to the heart of the gospel and reveals the wisdom of God in a *mystery* (something *hidden* that needs to be *revealed*).
  - iv. Identifying with prominent men, rather than with Christ, is unspiritual. It is following the 'wisdom' of this world (the Gentiles and their philosophies) rather than the wisdom of God.

- f. The subject of division within the church is the main subject from **1 Corinthians 1:10** through the end of **chapter 4**.

## II. Let No One Boast in Men

- a. This is a continuation of the discussion about unity in Corinth, where people were strongly identifying with prominent leaders.
  - i. Paul considered this to be an indication of worldly thinking, the kind typical of Gentile Greek culture.
- b. Read **1 Corinthians 3:18-23**.
  - i. Paul gives a directive here: "Let no one boast in men."
  - ii. This is a universal tendency in many people, to look for some person to be their hero, their champion.
    1. They will strongly identify with that person.
    2. They see their hero's accomplishments and victories as somehow making them look and feel better about themselves by association.
    3. The 'hero' status could be based on athletic ability, intellect, education, wealth, dynamic personality or accomplishments. We see this desire for a hero or strong man in politics, particularly in a crisis situation.
      - a. Throughout history, this has been the backdrop for a dictator (political or military leader) rising to power.
      - b. Many people want to place their complete trust, hope, and identity in certain leaders.
      - c. Churches are not immune to this common human weakness! I have seen this tendency in churches as well.
    4. That attitude got the Israelites into trouble in the days of Saul.
      - a. Read **1 Samuel 8** (designated **1 Kingdoms 8** in the LXX).
      - b. In a time of crisis especially, people want a strong leader to "fight our battles".
      - c. The people want to be "just like the other nations". In trying to resolve serious problems that have arisen, they *look to worldly examples* in the nations around them.

- d. God considers this to be a rejection of Him.
  - i. He is the one who is to lead them; they need to turn to Him for help. They do not need to become like the other nations, placing their confidence in a strong human leader.
- e. **Questions:**
  - i. Why would the Israelites do this, in light of the dire warnings given by Samuel?
  - ii. What does it reveal about the character of those who do this?
  - iii. **Possible Answers:**
    - 1. Laziness. It can be easier to have someone tell you what to do, rather than to seek direction from the Lord.
    - 2. Cowardice. Many desire to follow someone else, a hero to identify with, who will fight their battles for them.
    - 3. Faithlessness. Many want to seek shortcuts and rely on a person they can see, rather than putting their reliance on the unseen God.
    - 4. Those who lack confidence (for any reason) in what they personally are able to do with the help of God may be the most susceptible.

### III. More About Spiritual Wisdom

- a. This passage continues the discussion on worldly versus spiritual wisdom, from **chapters 1 and 2**.
- b. Paul is not disparaging wisdom, only “the wisdom *of this world*”.
  - i. “For the wisdom *of this world* is foolishness with God...” (**1 Corinthians 3:19**, NKJV)
- c. We need more wisdom, but it must be a *different type* of wisdom than that which the world seeks after.

- i. Here in Boston, home of MIT, Harvard and lots of other well-known colleges, there is an unusually strong value placed on worldly wisdom. Christians who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture are dismissed as foolish.
  1. An old nickname for Boston was '*The Athens of America*', due to the famous literary and philosophical figures who lived here.
  2. Some consider Boston to be the intellectual birthplace of the American Revolution.
  3. Given this, we must be aware that the wisdom exalted here in Boston is not the kind of wisdom that God esteems!
- ii. Here are five practical recommendations for obtaining the kind of wisdom that matters: true *spiritual wisdom*.
  1. Ask God for wisdom.
    - a. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (**James 1:5-8**, NKJV)
  2. Learn from the wisest of all time.
    - a. "The *queen of the South* will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the *wisdom of Solomon*; and indeed a *greater than Solomon* is here." (**Matthew 12:42**, NKJV)
    - b. Jesus challenges us to imitate the wisdom of the Queen of Sheba, whose story is discussed in **1 Kings 10**.
      - i. She came "from the ends of the earth" seeking for wisdom.
    - c. Learn from Solomon's wisdom (see **Proverbs, 1 Kings**). Also, study the other wisdom teachings found in the Scriptures.
    - d. Most important: look to Jesus, the wisest man who ever lived.

3. Spiritual wisdom starts with *the fear of God*.
  - a. “The *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom.”  
(**Proverbs 9:10**)
  - b. In **Proverbs**, Solomon speaks about the importance of wisdom and the foolishness of laziness, sexual immorality, etc.
4. Meditate on the Scriptures.
  - a. Read **Psalm 119/118:97-101**.
  - b. We can become wiser than our enemies, teachers, and elders – by going directly to the Scriptures, the source of all wisdom!
5. Do not wander off the path when you grow older.
  - a. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 47:12-20**.
    - i. Note that this book is included in the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament. It is in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, and in the LXX (Greek Old Testament used in the early church). It was in the original King James Version of the Bible and remained in that version until it was removed 100-150 years ago.
    - ii. In some Bibles, this book is referred to by the name: **Ecclesiasticus**.
  - b. Solomon was wise “*in his youth*”.
  - c. However, when he became older, he abandoned that wisdom and was “enslaved by his body”.
  - d. Let us learn important lessons from *both ends* of Solomon’s life: from his youth, *as well as from his older age!*

#### IV. Paul Uses the Old Testament to Make His Case

- a. Notice *the approach* Paul uses in **1 Corinthians 1-4**, regarding his lecture on division in the church and the foolishness of the world’s wisdom, to make his points.
  - i. Paul relies on the Scriptures (the Old Testament) and reason/logic.

1. Recall how Paul typically preached, as when he was in Thessalonica in **Acts 17**.
  - a. “Then Paul, *as his custom was*, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths *reasoned with them from the Scriptures...*” (**Acts 17:2**, NKJV)
- ii. Consider the logical reasoning Paul used in **1 Corinthians 1-4**.
  1. He used three rhetorical questions: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (**1 Corinthians 1:13**, NKJV)
  2. Paul also provided three analogies (prior lesson, **1 Corinthians 3:1-17**) to illustrate the kind of unity God desires in the church. His analogies were:
    - a. A baby transitioning from milk to solid food.
    - b. A farmer’s field, where one plants the seeds but another waters the growing crop.
    - c. The construction of a building (God’s temple).
- iii. Scriptures (Old Testament) used to make his point regarding the foolishness of worldly wisdom:
  1. “For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” (**1 Corinthians 1:19**, NKJV; quoting **Isaiah 29:14**)
  2. Also, **Jeremiah 9:23**, **Isaiah 64:2** and **Isaiah 40:13** were quoted in **1 Corinthians 1-2**.
  3. Here in **1 Corinthians 3**:
    - a. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness’; and again, ‘The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.’” (**1 Corinthians 3:19-20**, NKJV; quoting **Job 5:13** and **Psalms 94/93:11**)
    - b. Read **Psalms 94/93:8-11**.
- b. Paul has quoted six passages from the Old Testament to back up what he is teaching regarding the wisdom of God (three from **Isaiah**; one each from **Jeremiah**, **Psalms** and **Job**).
  - i. **Question:** What does that show us about Paul and how he taught?

1. He knew the Old Testament and used it to back up his teaching.
  2. He assumed that the Corinthian Christians he was addressing also were familiar with these passages.
  3. Paul, an apostle of Jesus who personally met the Lord, did not rely on his position, personality or emotion-based arguments to make his points. He backed up everything with Scripture.
    - a. Notice that Peter does the very same thing in **1 Peter**, relying on reason and the Scriptures (Old Testament) to support all the points he makes.
- ii. **Question:** Should we be using the same approach today?
1. Reasons/excuses I have heard to support the claim that we no longer need to use the Old Testament in our teaching today, include:
    - a. The Old Testament is considered no longer relevant by most Christians. The Law of Moses and the Old Covenant were abolished at the cross; we are now saved “by grace through faith” (from **Ephesians 2:8**).
      - i. But wait, wasn’t *Paul* the one who said that? Yes, he did. He also said...
        - ii. “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ *For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*” (**Romans 15:3–4**, NKJV; where Paul is quoting **Psalms 69/68:10**)
    - b. The apostles used the Old Testament (in **Acts** and **Hebrews**) and Jesus did the same in the gospels because they were reaching out to Jews. That is no longer the case, as we are reaching out to Gentiles.
      - i. However, Corinth was clearly a Gentile church, Greek-speaking, in Europe (Achaia); yet Paul is using the Old Testament extensively!
      - ii. Consider all the references to pagan issues (worldly philosophy, idolatry) in this letter.

1. This is not addressed to a Jewish audience struggling with issues related to the Law of Moses or circumcision!
  - iii. “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.” (**1 Corinthians 12:1-2**, NKJV)
  - c. Now that we have the New Testament, most Christians think we should just use that.
    - i. Clearly, that is *not what Paul thought!*
2. **The Challenge for Us:** If preachers/teachers want to use Paul and Peter’s approach, they will first have to:
  - a. Know the Old Testament themselves, and
  - b. Make sure the rest of the church knows it as well!
- c. **Question:** *How well* did the Corinthian Christians know the Old Testament?
  - i. **Hint:** Consider the evidence we have, based on Paul’s to letters to them (**1 and 2 Corinthians**).
  - ii. **Answer:** Extremely well! Paul assumes the Christians are aware his many Old Testament references, treasures of wisdom that inform the Christian faith.
  - iii. Let’s look at examples from these two letters.
    1. From **Genesis:**
      - a. Creation of the world, bringing light out of darkness. (See **2 Corinthians 4:6**)
      - b. Adam was created from the dust of the earth. (See **1 Corinthians 15:45**)
      - c. Eve created from Adam to be a helper to him. (See **1 Corinthians 11:8-12**)
      - d. Women to be silent “as the Law also says”, presumably referring to **Genesis 3**. (See **1 Corinthians 14:34**)
      - e. Eve deceived by Satan. (See **1 Corinthians 11:3**)
      - f. Circumcision. (See **1 Corinthians 7:19**)



**2. From Exodus:**

- a. The Passover Lamb and Feast of the Unleavened Bread. (See **1 Corinthians 5:7-8**)
- b. The manna story, with the detail that each one had a sufficient amount. (See **1 Corinthians 8:15**)
- c. The rock from which water came. (See **1 Corinthians 10:4**)
- d. Crossing the Red Sea, pillar of cloud and fire. (See **1 Corinthians 10:2**)
- e. The golden calf incident at Mount Sinai. (See **1 Corinthians 10:7**)
- f. The radiant face of Moses, which was covered by a veil. (See **2 Corinthians 3:7-14**)
- g. The stone tablets on which the 10 Commandments were written. (See **2 Corinthians 3:3-7**)

**3. From Leviticus:**

- a. The temple sacrificial system, including the altar and the priests who ate from what was offered. (See **1 Corinthians 9:13, 10:18**)
- b. The temple as a figure of our bodies in which the Holy Spirit dwells. (See **1 Corinthians 6:19**)

**4. From Numbers:**

- a. Details of the Wilderness journey, including: how they were fed in the Wilderness, complaining, testing, and immorality with Moabite women. (See **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**)

**5. From Deuteronomy:**

- a. Expelling the wicked person from the community, related to church discipline, quoting a phrase used several places in **Deuteronomy** related to punishing the wicked. (See **1 Corinthians 5:13**)
- b. "Don't muzzle the ox" from **Deuteronomy 25:4** is quoted, related to providing financial support to church leaders. (See **1 Corinthians 9:9**)

- c. “Don’t plow with an ox and donkey together” from **Deuteronomy 22:10** is alluded to in support of the principle that Christians should not be “yoked together” with unbelievers. (See **2 Corinthians 6:14**)
  - i. Note that this passage from **Deuteronomy**, as well as the previous one mentioned above, would be considered rather obscure passages from the Law of Moses. However, Paul used them with the Corinthians church to support very practical teachings.

#### 6. From **Psalms**:

- a. From **Psalm 94/93:11** regarding the Lord knowing that the thoughts of men are vain. (See **1 Corinthians 3:20**)
- b. Regarding all foods being acceptable, from **Psalm 23/24**. (See **1 Corinthians 10:25-28**)
- c. General statement by Paul alluding to prophecies that Christ would die for our sins “according to the Scriptures”, which calls to mind **Psalms 22/21, 69/68**, etc. (See **1 Corinthians 15:3**)
- d. General statement by Paul alluding to prophecies that Christ would be raised from the dead, alluding to **Psalm 16/15** and possibly to other psalms as well. (See **1 Corinthians 15:4**, and consider what Paul taught in **Acts 13:35**)
- e. Regarding the concept that all Christ’s enemies, including death, would be defeated and put “under his feet”, alluding to **Psalms 8** and **110/109**. (See **1 Corinthians 15:24-27**)
- f. Paul quotes from **Psalm 116:10** (designated **Psalm 115:1** in the LXX), “I believed, therefore I spoke.” (See **2 Corinthians 4:13**)
- g. Regarding God’s generosity in providing for all of us, he quotes from **Psalm 112/111:9**. (See **2 Corinthians 9:9**)

#### 7. From **Job**:

- a. Regarding the Lord catching the wise in their craftiness, Paul quotes from **Job 5:13**. (See **1 Corinthians 3:19**)

8. From the **Major Prophets**:

- a. **Isaiah**: There are at least six places in Paul's two letters to the Corinthians where he quotes from this prophet, including:

- i. **Isaiah 29:14 (1 Corinthians 1:19)**

- ii. **Isaiah 64:6 (1 Corinthians 2:9)**

- iii. **Isaiah 40:13 (1 Corinthians 2:16)**

- iv. **Isaiah 28:11-12 (1 Corinthians 14:21)**

- v. **Isaiah 25:8 (1 Corinthians 15:54)**

- vi. **Isaiah 49:8 (2 Corinthians 6:2)**

- vii. Plus, I assume that Paul has in mind the well-known **Isaiah 53** prophecy about the Suffering Servant (among other related prophecies) when he says that Christ *died for our sins* "according to the Scriptures". (**1 Corinthians 15:3**)

- b. **Jeremiah**:

- i. Paul quotes from **Jeremiah 9:23** in two places, in declaring that we should glory in the Lord, rather than in men. (**1 Corinthians 1:31** and **2 Corinthians 10:17**)

- c. **Ezekiel**:

- i. When Paul says "I will put my Spirit in them... I will be their God, and they shall be my people", he appears to be drawing from **Ezekiel 36:26-27** and **37:14, 27**.

9. From the **Minor Prophets**:

- a. Paul quotes from **Hosea 13:14** regarding death and Hades being defeated in the end. (See **1 Corinthians 15:55**)
- b. **Jonah 1-2** foreshadowing (see **Matthew 12:40**) and possibly also **Hosea 6:2** alluded to, regarding Christ

rising *on the third day* “according to the Scriptures”.  
(See **1 Corinthians 15:4**)

d. **Lessons for Us** from Paul’s extensive use of the Old Testament in his letters to the Corinthian church.

i. In light of all the examples noted above, consider the extraordinary breadth of familiarity with the Old Testament that Paul assumes the Gentile Christians in Corinth possess.

1. **Questions:**

- a. How many Christians today have that kind of familiarity with the Old Testament that they would recognize so many of these passages?
- b. What do you think we should learn from this, about the value and emphasis we should be putting on the Old Testament in our own churches and in our personal devotional lives?

ii. **Challenges for Us:**

1. To know the Scriptures and use them as Paul did.
2. Let us grasp the significance of what Paul wrote in **Romans 10:4**, that “whatever things were written before [*in the Old Testament*] were written *for our learning*”.
  - a. Those things were written for *Christians* to use and benefit from.
3. As Paul wrote to Timothy regarding the Old Testament:
  - a. “... *from childhood* you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *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.” (**2 Timothy 3:15–17**, NKJV)
  - b. The only Scriptures that would have been available to Timothy “from childhood” would have been the Old Testament. Recall that Timothy’s mother was Jewish (**Acts 16:1**).

- c. **Question:** Can you be “thoroughly equipped for every good work” spiritually if you do not know the Old Testament well?
  - i. How do you think *the apostle Paul* would answer that question?
- 4. Recall that Paul said that Christians from the church in Corinth were not yet ready for “solid food” (**1 Corinthians 3:2**). However, they already had an extraordinary foundation (at least by modern standards) in the Old Testament Scriptures!
  - iii. The Old Testament was *NOT just for the Jews*.
    - 1. The Old Testament, more particularly the Septuagint (LXX), was the Bible of the church in the beginning.
      - a. For evidence to support that assertion, consider Paul’s quote from the Psalms, in **Romans 3:10-18**. Check what Paul quotes there in the New Testament against both the Masoretic Text (MT) and the LXX.
    - 2. Shortly after the time Paul was writing his letters to the Corinthian church, Clement of Rome addressed a very practical letter (1 Clement) to the same church. This is one of the earliest Christian writings we have outside of the New Testament. Reading that letter, one can see how heavily Clement relies on the Old Testament (specifically the LXX). Like Paul, he assumes that his intended readers have an extraordinary level of knowledge of the details of the Old Testament Scriptures.
  - iv. **Question/Challenge:** How many of you would have been able to identify *even the six passages* from the Old Testament that Paul quoted from the Old Testament, which we have covered thus far in **1 Corinthians chapters 1-4**?
  - v. **Warning for us:** Just knowing the Old Testament well (like the Corinthians) will not make us spiritual people. We must put into practice and live out the wisdom found in all the Scriptures!

## V. Paul Says, “Don’t Judge Me”

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 4:1-7**.
  - i. We are servants of Christ and stewards of the “mysteries of God”, hidden things that now have been revealed to us.

- ii. “Judge nothing before the time.” (**1 Corinthians 4:5**)
  - 1. The term “judge” has multiple meanings. For example:
    - a. To *render a decision regarding* whether you believe someone is guilty or innocent of a charge (which may or may not have any spiritual implications).
    - b. To *make a determination regarding* whether someone is *guilty of a particular sin*.
    - c. To make an *investigation into something* that does not relate to guilt or sin (such as to judge which of two people is the older, taller or better looking one).
- iii. Also, note that the Greek word translated ‘judge’ in most places in the New Testament (krino / κρίνω) is different from the word used in this passage (anakrino / ἀνακρίνω). The word used here, as also found in the LXX, generally means: *to consider or to make an investigation into something*.
- iv. In context, I think Paul is commenting on whether people should be trying to discern: “*Who is better, Paul or Apollos?*”.
  - 1. Paul admonishes them not to do that!
  - 2. People sometimes use passages like this one to say no one in the church should judge anyone else.
    - a. **Question:** What do you think?
    - b. Some churches elevate non-judgment to the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment.
    - c. Others are extraordinarily picky and judgmental toward members and others, going beyond what the Scriptures command.
    - d. Consider what the Scriptures actually teach about judging, especially in the next lesson.

## VI. The Apostles were Generally Reviled

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 4:8-13**.
  - i. As discussed in a prior lesson in this series, this self-revelation should demolish the idea of the so-called ‘Prosperity Gospel’ in any form.

- ii. By worldly measures, the apostles generally endured *horrible lives* after the resurrection of Jesus as they spread the gospel message to the rest of the world.
  - 1. As early Christian apologist and historian Eusebius argued in his *Proof of the Gospel*, Book 3, the evidence of the lives of the apostles stands as one of the greatest confirmations of the validity of their testimony. Specifically, he points to their willingness to suffer death as evidence of the truth of the Gospel. Eusebius reasoned:
    - a. The apostles saw what happened to Jesus (His being tortured and crucified). They knew the truth regarding whether Jesus actually rose from the dead (versus if the resurrection was faked and they conspired to fabricate the story). They then went to the ends of the earth proclaiming this message, knowing they too would be tortured and killed for spreading this message.
    - b. **Questions:**
      - i. Why would this group of men voluntarily decide to *propagate a lie* all over the world?
      - ii. Why would they go to all the other nations and tell them that the gods they and their ancestors worshiped did not even exist?
      - iii. Why would they want to *suffer a similar* fate as Jesus (hatred, persecution, rejection and death) for something that *they knew was a lie*?
      - iv. What person would do such a foolish thing, unless they were convinced these events (the death and resurrection of Jesus on the third day) really did happen?

## VII. With Love and Gentleness, or with a Rod?

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 4:14-21**.
  - i. Paul is warning them as a caring spiritual father.
  - ii. He plans to visit them soon.
  - iii. There are two challenging statements that we will explore further in **1 Corinthians 4:20-21**.
- b. "The Kingdom of God is not about words, but about power."

- i. Talk is cheap. Words without action to back them up are empty.
- ii. From Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writing c. 105 AD:
  - 1. "It is better for a man to be silent and be [a Christian], than to talk and not to be one. 'The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.' (**1 Corinthians 4:20**) Men 'believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth,' the one 'unto righteousness,' the other 'unto salvation.' (**Romans 10:9-10**) It is good to teach, if he who speaks also acts. For he who shall both 'do and teach, the same shall be great in the kingdom.' (**Matthew 5:19**) Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, first did and then taught, as Luke testifies, 'whose praise is in the Gospel through all the Churches.' (**2 Corinthians 8:18**)
  - 2. "There is nothing which is hid from the Lord, but our very secrets are near to Him. Let us therefore do all things as those who have Him dwelling in us, that we may be His temples, and He may be in us as God. Let Christ speak in us, even as He did in Paul. Let the Holy Spirit teach us to speak the things of Christ in like manner as He did."
    - a. (Source: Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, chapter 15; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 56)
- iii. From Cyprian, a bishop in Carthage, North Africa, writing c. 250 AD:
  - 1. "[*Title*] That we must labour not with words, but with deeds.
  - 2. "In Solomon, in **Ecclesiasticus**: 'Be not hasty in your tongue, and in your deeds useless and remiss.' (**Wisdom of Sirach 4:29**) And Paul, in the first [letter] to the Corinthians: 'The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.' (**1 Corinthians 4:20**) Also to the **Romans**: 'Not the hearers of the law are righteous before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.' (**Romans 2:13**)
  - 3. "Also in the Gospel according to **Matthew**: 'He who shall do and teach so, shall be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' (**Matthew 5:19**) Also in the same place: 'Every one who hears my words, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock. The rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it did not fall: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one who hears my words, and does not do them, I will liken him to the foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. The rain descended,



the floods came, the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and its ruin became great.' (**Matthew 7:24-27**)”

- a. (Source: Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 12: Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, book 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 554)
- c. “Do you want me [*Paul*] to come in love and gentleness, *or with a rod?*”
  - i. **Question:** What does Paul mean when he asks them if they want him to come “with a rod”?
    1. In Scripture, “the rod” generally refers to the rod of correction, something that a father would discipline his disobedient son with.
  - ii. Examples of “the rod” (of correction) being used in the Scriptures include:
    1. Many places in the **Proverbs** related to administering corporal discipline, especially to children. (See **Proverbs 13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15**, etc.)
    2. In the prophecy about Jesus from **Isaiah 11**:
      - a. “There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall grow out of his root. The Spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and godliness. The Spirit of the fear of God shall fill Him. He shall not judge by reputation nor convict by common talk. But He will judge the cause of the humble, and reprove the humble of the earth. He shall strike the earth with the word of His mouth, and with breath of His lips He shall slay the ungodly. He shall gird His loins with righteousness and cover His sides with truth.” (**Isaiah 11:1-5**, LXX, OSB)
        - i. This prophecy was fulfilled in the baptism of Jesus, discussed in all four gospels, when the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove.
        - ii. This passage provides a wonderful, seven-fold (in the LXX) description of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

- iii. This passage also speaks of the rod that will come out of “the root of Jesse”, who is Jesus. **(Romans 15:12)**
  1. A rod (for correcting the nations) will come out of this root.
3. In the prophecy about Jesus in **Psalm 2**:
  - a. “You shall shepherd them with an iron rod; like a potter’s vessel you will shatter them.” **(Psalm 2:9, LXX, NETS)**
- iii. The rod is a painful, unpleasant way to teach or admonish someone. However, the Lord bears it and will use it if necessary. The same is true regarding the apostle Paul.
  1. Paul plans to visit the Corinthians. He says he would prefer to come with a spirit of love and gentleness. However, he warns them that if they do not heed his warnings, he will need to come to them...*with a rod!*
  2. Let us see Jesus and His Father accurately, demonstrating both goodness and severity **(Romans 11:22, Revelation 19:11-16)**. A more complete picture will help us gain a clearer vision of what it will take for us to become better Christians, parents and church leaders.
- iv. From Clement of Alexandria, in book 1 of *The Instructor*, writing c. 195 AD, we find a moving passage regarding prophecies about Jesus bearing the life-saving *rod of discipline*.
  1. “Now the law is ancient grace given through Moses by the Word. Wherefore also the Scripture says, ‘The law was given through Moses,’ **(John 1:17)** not by Moses, but by the Word, and through Moses His servant. Wherefore it was only temporary; but eternal grace and truth were by Jesus Christ. Mark the expressions of Scripture: of the law only is it said ‘was given;’ but truth being the grace of the Father, is the eternal work of the Word; and it is not said to be given, but to be by Jesus, without whom nothing was. **(John 1:3)**
  2. “Presently, therefore, Moses prophetically, giving place to the perfect Instructor the Word, predicts both the name and the office of Instructor, and committing to the people the commands of obedience, sets before them the Instructor. ‘A prophet,’ says he, ‘like Me shall God raise up to you of your brethren,’ pointing out Jesus the Son of God, by an allusion to

Jesus the son of Nun; for the name of Jesus predicted in the law was a shadow of Christ. He adds, therefore, consulting the advantage of the people, ‘Him shall you hear;’ and, ‘The man who will not hear that Prophet,’ (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**) him He threatens.

3. “Such a name, then, he predicts as that of the Instructor, who is the author of salvation. Wherefore prophecy invests Him with a rod, a rod of discipline, of rule of authority; that those whom the persuasive word heals not, the threatening may heal; and whom the threatening heals not, the rod may heal; and whom the rod heals not, the fire may devour. ‘There shall come forth,’ it is said, ‘a rod out of the root of Jesse.’ (**Isaiah 11:1**)
4. “See the care, and wisdom, and power of the Instructor: ‘He shall not judge according to opinion, nor according to report; but He shall dispense judgment to the humble, and reprove the sinners of the earth.’ (**Isaiah 11:3-4**)
5. “And by David: ‘The Lord instructing, has instructed me, and not given me over to death.’ (**Psalms 118/117:18**) For to be chastised of the Lord, and instructed, is deliverance from death. And by the same prophet He says: ‘You shall rule them with a rod of iron.’ (**Psalms 2:9**)
6. “Thus also the apostle, in the Epistle to the Corinthians, being moved, says, ‘What will you have? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love, in the spirit of meekness?’ (**1 Corinthians 4:21**) Also, ‘The Lord shall send the rod of strength out of Zion,’ (**Psalms 110/109:2**) He says by another prophet. And this same rod of instruction, ‘Your rod and staff have comforted me,’ (**Psalms 23/22:4**) said some one else. Such is the power of the Instructor—sacred, soothing, saving.”
  - a. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 1, chapter 7; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 224–225)
  - b. Note that Clement’s discussion regarding the name of Christ being revealed in the Law of Moses refers to the fact that Joshua (in Greek of the LXX = Jesus) was the successor to Moses. Joshua’s original name was *Hoshea, son of Nun*. It was changed to *Jesus* in **Numbers 13:16** (See that passage in the LXX; also see **Acts 7:45** and **Hebrews 4:8** in a Greek interlinear New Testament)

- v. Let us heed the gentle and loving admonitions of Jesus, the Son of God, so that He will not need to come after us with His rod of discipline!