



1 CORINTHIANS
MARKED
BY THE GOSPEL

PART 1

1 Corinthians Study

“Marked by the Gospel”

Many pressures and influences all around us seek to form and shape us. Our own way of thinking and living can oftentimes be shaped by our old sin nature. This results in deformed Christianity that does not reflect Christ. Paul sought to address all these areas of corruption and confusion that were plaguing the Corinthian church so that they might be transformed by the truth of the Gospel of Christ. He wanted their lives to be *marked by the Gospel*, rather than marked by the culture or by their own sin. That's the theme for 1 Corinthians we have chosen. Our prayer is that our lives would be marked more and more by the Gospel of Christ, that as we keep the Scriptures in our hearts our lives would be marked by Christ!

Nathan for the Faith Bible Church elders and the Growth Guide editing team (Howard Amland, Tom Dudenhofer, Lana Pustovit (publishing), Marty Tornquist, Seth Weber (graphics), Lynn Yount)

SCHEDULE

January 29 – 1:1-3 Greeting and introduction to 1 Corinthians

February 5 – 1:4-9 Thanksgiving for God's grace and gifts

February 12 – 1:10-17 Gospel unity: Reject factions in the church

February 19 – 1:18-25 The word of the cross: Foolishness to the perishing and power of God for His saved people

February 26 – 1:26-31 Consider your calling: Boast in the Triune God!

March 5 – 2:1-5 Paul the herald: Proclaiming Christ crucified

March 12 – 2:6-13 Preaching God's wisdom revealed by the Spirit

March 19 – 2:14-16 Spiritual discernment through Christ

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Week 1 - Greeting and introduction to 1 Corinthians - "Marked by the Gospel"

Sermon January 29, discuss in Growth Groups January 29 - February 4

Learning & Application Objectives

See that those who call on the Lord are called by God to be saints, set apart in Christ Jesus, living lives marked by the Gospel (lives that are shaped and transformed by God's Word through our relationship with Jesus). Be formed and marked by the Gospel rather than the culture around us or the flesh.

Launching Question

What do you know about the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians overall?

Acts 18:1-18

1. What do you learn here about the beginnings of the church in Corinth?

Corinth

Corinth was a very influential crossroads in the world in the first century. Anyone traveling from northern Greece to the southern peninsula had to pass through Corinth (look at your Bible's maps to see where Corinth was located). Furthermore, any merchants or travelers going east and west would often pass through Corinth rather than sailing around the dangerous southern tip of Greece. It was established as a Roman colony, with many influences from Roman culture in addition to Greek cultural influences. For example, Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games (second only to the Olympic Games) which attracted numerous people from the Mediterranean area, including North Africa, Italy, and Asia Minor. The culture of Corinth fostered a pursuit of status through association with skilled orators, tempted them with a blatant sexual immorality, and flaunted diverse idol worship. Each of these themes are dealt with in large sections of this letter. The Corinthian believers were being marked by their morally corrupt culture and by the world around them. Paul labors in his letter so that they **would rather be marked by the Gospel of Christ.**

Overview and Structure of 1 Corinthians

A wonderful exercise with any book you are studying is to read through the whole book and outline the main sections of the book. If you have time to do that now, that would be an excellent way to prepare for studying the book of 1 Corinthians. In addition, just repeatedly reading through the whole book or listening to it throughout our study will help you keep the passage we are studying in its context.

Outline and Structure of 1 Corinthians

(Taken from David Garland, *1 Corinthians - Baker Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 21-23)

1:1-9 Greeting and prayer of thanksgiving for God's grace given to them

1:10- 4:21 Factions and dissension in the church

5:1-6:20 Incest, lawsuits, and prostitution

7:1-40 Instructions about sexual relations, divorce and marriage

8:1-11:1 The dispute over food sacrificed to idols

11:2-16 Headdress in public worship

11:17-34 Divisions at the Lord's supper

12:1-14:40 The use of spiritual gifts in public worship

15:1-58 The resurrection

16:1-12 Instructions for the collection and travel itineraries

16:13-24 Letter closing

Paul writes this letter to a church that was tossed to and fro by various sins and questions that had arisen in large part from the influence of the culture around them. The church in Corinth was being factious and seeking greatness through affiliation with skilled public speakers, rather than being united around Christ. They were living out divisions between the poor and the wealthy in their celebration of the Lord's supper. They were permitting ongoing practice of grievous sin and excusing sexual immorality. They were confused about how to respond to many issues related to marriage and divorce, as well as idolatry and food sacrificed to idols. Their practice of spiritual gifts was influenced by the pagan religions around them and by a pursuit of recognition and esteem. They were doubting the resurrection. To this church riddled with strife and sin, Paul writes a letter full of encouragement, teaching, confrontation and hope. He gives them a full dose of the Gospel to correct and straighten out what was broken. Let's observe in this lesson how he encourages them with their true identity in Christ as those who are set apart in Christ, called as holy ones by God. He sets the foundation with these Gospel truths so that he can show them how to live lives that are marked by the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

2. What do you learn about the author(s) of 1 Corinthians?
3. What do you learn about the audience or recipients of this letter?
4. What attributes of God are emphasized in the greeting in verse 3?

Discussion Questions

5. Why do you think Paul spends so much time emphasizing the identity of the Corinthians at the beginning of the letter?
6. Some of Paul's letters focus on teaching theology or giving positive instructions about ministry. While this letter does have much teaching and instruction about ministry, there is a large portion of the letter that is focused on exhortation and correction in light of the ways the Corinthians were sinning. What impact should remembering that they are set apart in Christ Jesus and called to be holy have on their battle against sin?

Application

7. What does it look like (or should it look like) for you to live out your identity and calling as one who is sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be a saint (to be holy)?

8. How do you experience grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in your life each day? How do these realities impact or mark your life each day?

Equipping for Evangelism

Paul greets the believers in the church of Corinth with this rich greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3).

9. How does this greeting of grace and peace in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ describe the whole Gospel message that we seek to share with those who do not know Christ yet?

Prayer

Father God, we thank you for the grace and peace that You and our Lord Jesus Christ give us. Thank you for sending Paul and others to give us Your Word. Thank you for making us Your church, for setting us apart in Christ Jesus to be holy. Help us to live as those marked by the Gospel of Christ, living holy lives, devoted to You, not being conformed to the world around us that is rebelling against You. We are privileged to be among your people who call on the name of the Lord Jesus, our Savior and our Lord. May you receive much praise from our lives as we are shaped by the Gospel.

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Week 2 - Thanksgiving for God's grace and gifts

Sermon February 5, Discuss in Growth Groups February 5-11

Learning & Application Objectives

Understand and give thanks for the grace of God in Christ Jesus that enriches all who have trusted in Christ with all speech and knowledge and every necessary gift. Give thanks because Christ confirms and establishes all whom God calls into fellowship with Christ Jesus His Son.

Launching Question

Ephesians 1:3 says we have every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. What is one of the gifts or blessings that God has given you for which you are thankful?

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

1. Paul thanks God for the grace which was given the Corinthians in Christ Jesus. You could divide up the ways this grace is given to them in categories of past grace, present grace and future grace. What do you see in these verses about how they have received the grace of God?

1:4-6 Past Grace

1:7 Present Grace

1:8 Future Grace

2. How does Paul describe God and what He did to the Corinthians in verse 9?

Discussion Questions

3. The definition of fellowship (*Koinonia* in the original Greek) is “close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship” according to *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, p. 552. The same lexicon defines grace (*Charis* in the Greek) like this: “a beneficent disposition toward someone, favor, grace, gracious care/help, goodwill.” With these two definitions in mind (as well as other references in Scripture like Ephesians 1:3-14 and 1 Corinthians 1:30-31), what does it mean that God has given us His *grace* “in Christ Jesus” and He has called us into “*fellowship* with His Son”?
4. Verse 7 says “so that you are not lacking any gift.” Why do you think Paul spends so much time in this thanksgiving section (v. 4-9) reminding them and thanking God for the gifts He has given them?

“Speech and knowledge and gifts”

At the point of salvation, believers in Christ receive all the knowledge they need in order to speak the truth of the Gospel. All new believers are blessed with a regenerated heart and a mind that is able to begin grasping the truths of the Gospel and the ability to share their testimony and newfound faith with others. We will see in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in everyone who believes in Christ. God has given all good gifts necessary to enable every believer to learn, grow, and share the Gospel as they study God’s Word and prayerfully seek His will, wisdom, and opportunities to evangelize the lost. Let’s all strive to remember this wonderful truth as we serve our Lord together at Faith as a loving community making disciples of Jesus Christ.

5. What are all who trust in Christ looking forward to when Jesus comes again? (See 1 John 3:2, Philippians 3:21, Colossians 3:4)

6. What does it mean that God will “sustain you (confirm you or make you strong) to the end, guiltless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”? How does God do that work of keeping His children until the end? (See Jesus’ prayer in John 17:11-19 for some ideas as well as the exhortation in Hebrews 3:12-14 and Hebrews 10:22-25.)

Application

7. What are some ways you have seen evidence that you have received the grace of God in Christ Jesus and have been “enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge”? In other words, what is your testimony about how Christ Jesus has changed your life?
8. How is your identity and ministry strengthened by the truths you see in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9? What truths from this section do you need to remember as you seek to minister to others?
9. In what ways do you want to depend on and delight in Jesus?

Equipping for Evangelism

Often our own fears regarding our inadequacy to share the Gospel will keep us from being bold when speaking of Christ with others. We see in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 some encouraging truths that should help us.

10. What motivations for being bold with the Gospel do you see in these verses?

Prayer

God, You are so faithful. We praise you for calling us into fellowship with Your Son, our Lord. We get to share in His righteousness, receiving a privileged position as your sons and daughters. We are transformed day by day by our union with Him. His death delivers us from the penalty, power, and eventually the presence of sin. Thank you for giving us all the gifts we need to serve you and to know you and to make you known! Help us to faithfully depend on You who are faithful as we fellowship with your Son!

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Week 3 - Gospel unity: Reject factions in the church

Sermon February 12, Discuss in Growth Groups February 12-18

Learning & Application Objectives

Recognize that the Lord's messengers preach the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, not in eloquent words of wisdom. We must all have the same mind and judgment, seeing that our identity is in Christ. We are baptized in His name.

Launching Question

What sorts of issues tend to divide churches in our modern context?

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1. What exhortation does Paul give the Corinthians in verse 10?
2. What was happening in the church in Corinth, according to verses 11-12?
3. Paul uses three rhetorical questions in 1:13. For each of these questions, write the truths that rightly answer the question. What is Paul emphasizing through these questions?

"Is Christ divided?"

"Was Paul crucified for you?"

"Were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

Discussion Questions

4. What is Paul's theology of baptism? The way he talks about it in this passage, you might think that he is devaluing baptism. Observe what Romans 6:3-4 tell us about his view of baptism.
5. What does Jesus say about baptism in Matthew 28:19-20?
6. What is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16?
7. What was Paul's mission, according to 1:17?
8. Why was Paul committed to preaching the Gospel without words of eloquent wisdom, according to verse 17?

"Wisdom of word" from 1:17

According to David Garland in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, the phrase translated "words of eloquent wisdom" in 1 Corinthians 1:17 is literally "wisdom of word," a phrase meaning "clever, skilled, educated or rhetorically sophisticated speech" that was used for "winning arguments and impressing an audience by rhetorical display rather than content. ... A direct connection existed between cleverness in speech and social status." Paul refused to engage in this kind of speech because "eloquence that elevates the status of the preacher cancels the power of the cross." He gives three reasons rhetorical eloquence threatens to render the cross of no effect. (continued)

- “It subverts the dynamic of the persuasive power of the cross by substituting the dynamic of human rhetorical persuasion...[the audience] is swayed by the power of the orator’s rhetorical skill rather than converted by the power of the cross.” It involves the speaker seeking the admiration of the audience – the opposite of emptying oneself, “which is the paradigm presented by the cross.”
- “Sophisticated rhetoric was tied to an educational value system that ‘enshrined the beautiful and the strong in a position of social power.’” The preaching of the cross “opposes the cultural values surrounding eloquence.”
- “Clever rhetoric is superficial. It shortcuts the transformation of listeners by simply gaining their assent. It appeals to the emotions without touching the spiritual depths.”

*All quotes taken from David Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*, 2003, pp. 56-58.

Application

9. It is easy to be impressed with a preacher who is clever and eloquent. However, we see here that clever or eloquent preaching is not the best way to evaluate a church overall or whether a church or minister is being faithful to God. How should we evaluate whether or not a church or preacher is faithful?
10. What issues can lead us to create factions or divisions within our own church? Are there ways that we live like we are “of Paul” or “of Apollos” or some other preacher?
11. What does our culture want us to look to for our identity? How might you seek to find your identity and importance apart from Christ? In other words, what idols might you look to for significance and value and belonging?

Equipping for Evangelism

Paul says he was sent to preach the Gospel not in words of eloquent wisdom so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power. When we seek to win people to Christ through our own human cunning, we are functionally denying the power of the cross of Christ. When we rely on our crafty words or appeal to people's fleshly desires or the world's value system, we are acting as if simply and clearly proclaiming Christ crucified were not enough. We are putting our trust in ourselves rather than in Christ. Conversely, when we do not preach the Gospel of Christ because we are doubtful that others would believe it, we are similarly denying the power of the cross of Christ. We learn from 1 Corinthians 1:17 that we must preach the Gospel of Christ, trusting the power of the cross of Christ and the Spirit of God to open people's eyes to the truth of the Gospel and to bring them to faith and repentance. It is not our own greatness or compelling personality or witty words that will save someone. It is a faithful and clear proclamation of the good news of Jesus that God uses to call and to save those who are lost and blind in their sin.

12. In what ways might you be tempted to rely on something other than the power of God through the preaching of the cross of Christ to convince others?

13. What are you thinking, perhaps subconsciously, when your doubt about God's ability to save others leads you to be quiet and not speak the Gospel?

Prayer

God, forgive us for seeking significance through the approval of others or our identification with those servants of Yours to whom we ascribe more glory. Forgive us for seeking to establish our own greatness through our association with others or with material wealth or beauty or our own success. May we glory in Christ alone and trust that our identity in Him is sufficient. May we live to know Christ and to make Him known through all that we do!

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Week 4 - The word of the cross: Foolishness to the perishing and the power of God for His saved people

Sermon February 19, Discuss in Growth Groups February 19-25

Learning & Application Objectives

Understand why the word of the cross is foolishness to the world but the power of God to those who are being saved. Be confident in Christ, who is the power and wisdom of God.

Launching Question

What does our world teach about the good life and the way to enjoy that good life? What is the culture around us teaching as their “good news”?

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

1. The word *power* is repeated in 1:17, 1:18, 1:24, and 1:25 (*stronger* rather than *power*). The Corinthians were impressed with persuasive, wise speech according to the world's standards. Paul points them to power rather than words of eloquent wisdom. What is the power that Paul is exalting in these verses?
2. In this section Paul describes the Gospel with different phrases that describe Christ and His crucifixion. With each mention of Christ crucified, what do you learn?

1:17 *the cross of Christ*

1:18 *the word of the cross*

1:23 *Christ crucified*

3. What has God done with the wisdom of this age, according to 1:19-20?
4. Rather than earthly wisdom, what does God use to save people, according to 1:21?
5. What distinct values are the Jews and Gentiles seeking when it comes to looking for a way of salvation, according to 1:22?

Discussion Questions

6. Given that Jews are seeking signs and the fulfillment of the promises that God made to David about his son reigning on the throne forever, and Gentiles are seeking compelling worldly wisdom with persuasive arguments, why is a crucified Messiah a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1:23)?
7. Why does the wisdom of humanity fall short in identifying the true way of salvation?

1 Corinthians 1:24-25

8. What do we see in verse 24 about what Christ is to those who are called by God from among the Jews and the Gentiles?
9. What do we learn about the wisdom and power of God from this section?

Wisdom and Folly

“Paul emphasizes the foolishness of the cross because the Corinthians are entranced by human rhetoric and virtuosity and have forgotten the roots of their faith. The cross turns reality upside down. What is considered wise among human beings is actually foolish in God’s sight. Indeed, God, in his infinite wisdom, determined that human wisdom would not be the pathway to the knowledge of God. If the creativity and brilliance of human beings led to salvation, praise would belong to the wisest and most gifted human beings. The message of the cross reverses and undercuts the expectations of human beings. Weakness becomes the circuit through which strength is conveyed, and what seems to be foolish – the message of the cross – becomes the vehicle by which wisdom is transmitted. Power is not displayed fundamentally through amazing signs and wonders but through a crucified man, a person robbed of all dignity who was exposed to the most degrading death conceived of in the Graeco-Roman world.” – Thomas Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series, p. 115.

Application Questions

10. In what ways are you tempted to believe or teach a false gospel that matches the world’s wisdom and vision of the good life? For example, have you adopted the view that God’s blessing in this life always includes your family looking successful, or being materially prosperous, or having good health? What wrong understandings of the true Gospel tend to tempt or influence you?

11. How have you experienced the power of God in your life through faith in our crucified Savior?

12. In what ways do you need to put off trusting in worldly wisdom (what our culture tells us is true) and put your trust in Christ? What practical ways would you do this?

Carl Trueman on the theology of the cross by Martin Luther

Carl Trueman describes the “theology of the cross” as the opposite of the “theology of glory” as it was described by Martin Luther, the 16th century Reformation theologian. He says at the heart of the theology of the cross “was the notion that God reveals himself under his opposite; or, to express this another way, God achieves his intended purposes by doing the exact opposite of that which humans might expect. The supreme example of this is the cross itself: God triumphs over sin and evil by allowing sin and evil to triumph (apparently) over him. His real strength is demonstrated through apparent weakness. This was the way a theologian of the cross thought about God.

“The opposite to this was the theologian of glory. In simple terms, the theologian of glory assumed that there was basic continuity between the way the world is and the way God is: if strength is demonstrated through raw power on earth, then God’s strength must be the same, only extended to infinity. To such a theologian, the cross is simply foolishness, a piece of nonsense.” From “The Forgotten Insight” found at:

<https://www.reformation21.org/mos/postcards-from-palookaville/the-forgotten-insight>

Equipping for Evangelism

13. How do you know that you are faithfully believing and preaching the Gospel? What must be present in your preaching and teaching of the Gospel, according to 1 Corinthians 1:18-25?

Prayer

God, humanity is so blinded by our pride that we think our own persuasive words and self-affirming speech will bring true salvation and the good life. Help us to see and believe that it is only through the crucifixion of the Son of God that we could have our sins forgiven and be reconciled to You. Thank you, Christ, for dying for us and for saving us in such a way that all human, worldly wisdom was confounded. No one can come to you through their own prideful efforts. No one can find salvation apart from humbly trusting in You and You alone. Only through the gift of Your Son and His death could anyone be made alive with You. We praise You for the power of the cross, the power to forgive us, to reconcile us to You, to make us alive with Christ, and to transform us day by day into His image until the day that we see Him face to face and we are perfectly transformed by His power!

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Week 5 - Consider your calling: Boast in the Triune God!

Sermon February 26, Discuss in Growth Groups February 26-March 4

Learning & Application Objectives

Recognize that God calls and chooses people for salvation not based on their earthly status or greatness, but based on His greatness. Therefore, we should boast in the Lord.

Launching Question

When someone puts together an Olympic basketball team for their country or the cast for their movie production or the selection for their World Cup soccer team, they usually choose whomever is considered the best or the greatest at that sport or craft. What would be the purpose of a coach or movie director choosing a bunch of people who have very little talent or fame for their team or cast?

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

1. According to 1:26-29, whom did God choose (what kinds of people) and what was His purpose in choosing them?

Gospel Calling

"In most instances, those who were called to faith in Corinth did not come from the intellectual class, from those with political influence or from the elite sector of society. Graeco-Roman society prized status and honor, and it was a natural temptation to desire a high social status. The majority in the church in Corinth were of low social status, but there were some with influence and status: Crispus (1:14) and Erastus (Rom. 16:23); Stephanas (1:16; 16:15); Chloe (1:11); Aquila and Priscilla (16:19)." (Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, p.116)

Even today, most of the millions of evangelical believers are not the most powerful, wealthy and famous people of the world. Not many of those whom God saves are the people the world considers great. Worldly status, power, and wealth make responding to the call to "take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Jesus" quite difficult. God does save some of the world's elite, but not many. The point is this: God's calling and mercy are what give salvation, not the status or worldly power or wisdom of the individual.

2. According to 1:30a, why are these believers “in Christ Jesus”?
3. What is Christ to them (and to all who have trusted in Him), according to 1:30b?

Discussion Questions

4. What does it mean that Christ Jesus became to us “wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption”?
5. In what ways does 1:26-31 lead us to boast in the Lord? Conversely, how does this passage put to death pride and boasting in self?

Application Questions

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 describes God’s choice of those who by the world’s standards are lacking greatness. Ephesians 1:4 talks about a choice that God made before the foundation of the world; John 6:44 talks about a drawing of people to Himself that is effective. We know that the Gospel invitation goes out to all of humanity and that each person has a responsibility to repent and believe. However, we must never lose sight of the reality that our Sovereign God has chosen for His family, His kingdom, a people who were not great by the world’s standards. The people of God cannot boast that God chose them because of their status or credentials. The greatness and glory in every aspect of salvation belong to God alone!

6. How does your own calling by God fit with 1 Corinthians 1:26-31? What was your earthly status before the King of Kings called you to belong to His Kingdom and His family?

7. 1 Corinthians 1:30 is a verse that contains some truths that are massively impactful for your daily life as a Christian. Spend some time thinking about the impact of each of these truths on your life and write down some of your thoughts:

“Because of Him (literally *from Him*) you are in Christ Jesus”

“Christ Jesus became to us wisdom from God”

“Christ Jesus became to us...righteousness...”

“Christ Jesus became to us...sanctification...”

“Christ Jesus became to us...redemption...”

8. How do you want to live differently this week because of your union with Christ who has made you wise for salvation, has made you righteous, has sanctified you and has redeemed you? What do you want to put off and put on because of your position in Christ?

9. Spend time praising God and worshipping Christ for His gracious calling and choosing of you and for how He has placed us in Christ who is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Write a short prayer of thanksgiving to God.

Equipping for Evangelism

10. Sometimes we try to figure out who might respond to the Gospel favorably before we share the Gospel with someone. Or, we might think about someone's life and think there is no chance they would trust in Christ because of their current lack of piety or knowledge of God or some other characteristic we observe to be lacking. This passage challenges our view of who God saves and why He saves them. What do you learn from 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 about the kinds of people that God saves? How does this passage encourage you to speak the Gospel to others?

11. Who are you encouraged to share the Gospel with based on what you see in this passage?

Prayer

God of heaven and earth, You are full of mercy and kindness! You call the lowest and weakest and smallest people of the earth to be Your children. No one who comes to You for salvation is accepted on the basis of their own status or works or merit. We all come to you through Christ Jesus. You choose us because You are rich in mercy. Thank you for choosing us to belong to you. Thank You for placing us in Christ! Thank you Christ for being to us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. You show us the truth about who God is and how to come to Him through faith in You! You make us righteous with your own righteousness. You set us apart in Yourself as sons and daughters of God. You redeem us and make us Your own. We love You and worship You! May our lives reflect these amazing realities of Your salvation as we put off our old life and put on the life of Christ day by day!

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Week 6 - Paul the herald: Proclaiming Christ crucified

Sermon March 5, Discuss with Growth Groups March 5-11

Learning & Application Objectives

Understand that true gospel preaching is done in the power of God's Spirit, not through clever, persuasive speech. Don't be led astray by the temptation to put your confidence in that which is impressive by the world's standards; rather, trust in God and His power as the Spirit of God works through His Word.

Launching Question

How can you tell when a speaker or preacher is depending on the power of God to work in the hearers rather than trusting in the power of their own words?

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

1. What do you learn about Paul's preaching from this section?
2. Paul started this idea in 1:17. He took a break to discuss earthly wisdom and the cross and the greatness of God in salvation. Now he continues the same idea he started in 1:17. What is it that Paul says he avoided, according to 1:17 and 2:1?
3. Rather than using the worldly methods of crafting persuasive, worldly-wise messages, what did Paul preach, according to 2:2?
4. Rather than trying to appear great and powerful and persuasive in his own presentation of himself, how did Paul come to them in his preaching and ministry, according to 2:3?

“Weakness, fear and trembling”

“Paul’s weakness, fear and trembling could be understood as natural human weakness and fear, as if he was nervous in bringing the message to an alien audience. Others understand weakness to reflect a physical disease. More likely, Paul’s weakness is general, functioning as a corollary to the weakness of Christ on the cross. Such a reading is supported by 2 Corinthians 13:4, where Paul says that Christ ‘was crucified in weakness’ and then goes on to say, ‘we are weak in him’ (cf. also 1 Cor. 1:25). The life of the apostle replicates (though not exactly, of course) and matches the life of his Lord. The pathway to power is through weakness. Fear and trembling (cf. 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12) should not be understood as anxiety about how human beings would receive Paul, but describes Paul’s state before God. He was fearful that he would rely on himself, on his own rhetorical abilities, such that his proclamation would be ill-suited to the message of the cross.”

(Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, p. 122)

5. What does Paul say that his preaching was not and what does he say that it was in 2:4?

6. What was his goal in preaching that way, according to 2:5?

“Not in plausible words”

“Paul, according to Acts, did try to persuade his hearers to believe (Acts 18:4, 13; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23). What he rejected was trying to persuade people in the wrong way. Paul did not want the Corinthians to be so entranced with the style and flair of his discourse that they found themselves accepting what Paul said for stylistic instead of substantive reasons. Hence Paul relied instead on the power of the Spirit in his preaching.”

(Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, p. 122)

Discussion Questions

7. In 1:17, 1:18, and 1:24, we noted how Paul emphasized the power of God in association with the message about Christ crucified. How does his teaching about his preaching here demonstrate the same connection? (*Notice what he preaches in 2:2 and the connection to power in 2:4*) What new Agent does he show is involved in Gospel preaching that he had not mentioned before?

8. Why was Paul so concerned not to use a style of preaching that would have fit with the Corinthians' definition of oratory greatness?

Application Questions

9. In what ways might we seek to place our trust in someone or something besides Christ crucified for us? How do we seek to avoid living in weakness and fear and trembling?
10. How can we practice putting our trust in Christ crucified and the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives as we trust in Christ?

Equipping for Evangelism

11. It is tempting to think that our fancy Gospel presentation or convincing argument is what God will use to save someone from being spiritually dead and blind. What do we see in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 that God actually uses to save people? What should we focus on when we share the Gospel with others?

Prayer

Father, You are working in great power by Your Spirit through the preaching of the cross of Christ to transfer Your children from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of Your beloved Son! We praise You for the wonderful way that You work to save us in a way that does not depend on human cunning or wisdom. Help us to trust in You, Christ, and to preach the Gospel faithfully, not looking to human methods or strategies to get people to believe. May our lives be lived in weakness and trembling before You, depending on Christ and His power to be our strength!

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 2:6-13

Week 7 - Preaching God's wisdom revealed by the Spirit

Sermon March 12, Discuss with Growth Groups March 12-18

Learning & Application Objectives

Understand that true wisdom from God is only obtained by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Recognize that messengers of God's wisdom (i.e., the Gospel) are not to be exalted as the source of Gospel wisdom. Give praise to God because He reveals the Gospel by His Spirit.

Launching Question

What is something that you hid by keeping a secret so that you could later reveal it to someone as a way to love them?

1 Corinthians 2:6-9

1. Paul ended the previous section by emphasizing that his preaching of the Gospel was not in human wisdom. In this section he explains what kind of wisdom he was using. What do you learn about the true wisdom of God in the Gospel from 2:6-7? What is not true wisdom and what is true wisdom?
2. What evidence does Paul give in 2:8 that the rulers of this age did not understand God's wisdom?
3. The mysteries of the Gospel, true wisdom, are described in 2:9 using a quote from Isaiah 64:4. What do you learn about what God had hidden from humanity so that it could only be discovered through divine revelation?

Discussion Question

4. This true wisdom from God is imparted by Paul to the spiritually mature. It is not understood by those who are considered great by the world's standards, who are doomed to pass away. How does this teaching impact the Corinthians' wrong view that they needed to be connected to men who were great by the world's standards of wisdom?

5. How would you summarize the wisdom from God that Paul is imparting, "what God has prepared for those who love him"?

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

6. Who reveals these wonderful things which were hidden and now are being revealed through the true wisdom of the Gospel?

2 Peter 1:19-21

7. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the production of divine revelation?

1 Corinthians 2:12, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

8. Not only does the Holy Spirit inspire the authors of Scripture so that they speak and write the very words of God, but He also illuminates believers, so that they might understand the things given to us by God. What does the Holy Spirit do in our hearts and minds and lives with the Word of God as we hear it?

Discussion Question

9. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says Paul is teaching words taught by the “Spirit, explaining spiritual (truths) for spiritual (people).” Versions of the word Spirit are listed three times in a row in the last part of verse 13, emphasizing the vital role of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of the gospel. If someone were being tempted to give too much credit to human teachers and to exalt certain preachers, how would this teaching help them to put their focus and hope in the Lord rather than other people?

Application Questions

10. How might you be forgetting that the true wisdom of the Gospel, the Word of God in the Bible, is only given and understood by the Holy Spirit? What does it look like when we are not believing this truth?

11. Write a prayer of thanksgiving and worship to God the Father and the Son for sending the Spirit to give us His Word, and to open our eyes to understand and believe and be changed by the Word.

Equipping for Evangelism

There is only one source of truth that can bring true salvation to those who are lost and condemned in their sins. Only the Word of God, inspired by the Spirit and understood through the work of the Spirit, can give someone true saving faith. Our efforts to share the Gospel with those who are lost must revolve around helping them to hear, read and study the Word of God.

12. What are some ways you could use the Bible in your Gospel sharing.

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

Week 8 - Spiritual Discernment Through Christ

Sermon March 19, Discuss with Growth Groups March 19-25

Learning & Application Objectives

See that those who do not have the Holy Spirit are not able to understand true wisdom from God - it is foolishness to them. Recognize that we have received the mind of Christ and live out that humility, boasting in the Lord and not in self or leaders in the church.

Launching Question

What examples have you had of people who had a very good grasp of the Gospel who had the mind of Christ, living as servants of God and others?

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

1. Who is the “natural person” (contrasted with the “spiritual person” from 1 Corinthians 2:6-13) that Paul is talking about in verse 14?
2. Why does the natural person not accept the true wisdom of God in the Gospel? (See also 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 and 2 Corinthians 4:4 for further explanation.)
3. The person who has the Spirit of God in them, the “spiritual person,” is able to examine or investigate (these are both better ways to interpret the word in 2:15 rather than “judge”) all things. What are the things Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 2 that the spiritual person is able to examine and understand, but the natural person is not able to understand?

Discussion Questions

4. Who truly examines and understands the spiritual person who has believed the Gospel and has the Spirit of God dwelling in them? What does Paul mean at the end of verse 15 when he says the spiritual person is examined or understood by no one?
5. Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 in 1 Corinthians 2:16, saying, “Who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?” What is this rhetorical question emphasizing in the context of this passage about the Spirit and the true wisdom that He alone reveals?
6. When Paul says, “But we have the mind of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 2:16, how is he encouraging them to think? Keep in mind that this section started in 1:10 with Paul commanding them to be “united in the same mind” rather than being divided by their prideful fractiousness. Incorporate what you see from Philippians 2:5-11 in your answer about what the mind of Christ is.

Summary of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

“Knowing God is a matter not of human discovery but divine revelation. Indeed, such revelation is granted by the Holy Spirit who discloses the truths about God to believers. Since the Spirit grants us knowledge about God, there is no basis for human pride about such knowledge. No human being has an inherent capacity to know God; thus the only pathway for knowing God is if he takes the initiative in revealing himself – and he has done that very thing in the cross of Christ. Unbelievers, however, reject the truth about Christ as foolish; hence they do not welcome the things of the Spirit. It is also evident that the Holy Spirit is personal, since he understands God’s thoughts and explains them to believers, activities which cannot be ascribed to a force or influence.” (Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, p.132)

Application Questions

7. Paul has shown the Corinthians that only by the Spirit can someone understand God's true wisdom in the Gospel, the word of the cross. If we have received the Spirit and have understood how God has saved us through the crucifixion of Christ, we should imitate Christ's humility, obedience and love. What practices will help you grow in being like Christ in your thinking and living?
8. Spend time praising God for giving you His Spirit and opening your eyes to understand His glory in Christ and His cross. Write out a prayer of praise to God for all that He has shown you through the Gospel.

Equipping for Evangelism

9. How does having the mind of Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost, being willing to be a servant and to suffer death to rescue us from our sin, empower and motivate you for evangelism?

Sermon Notes or Prayer Requests

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