

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY MAY 19, 2024
1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-31

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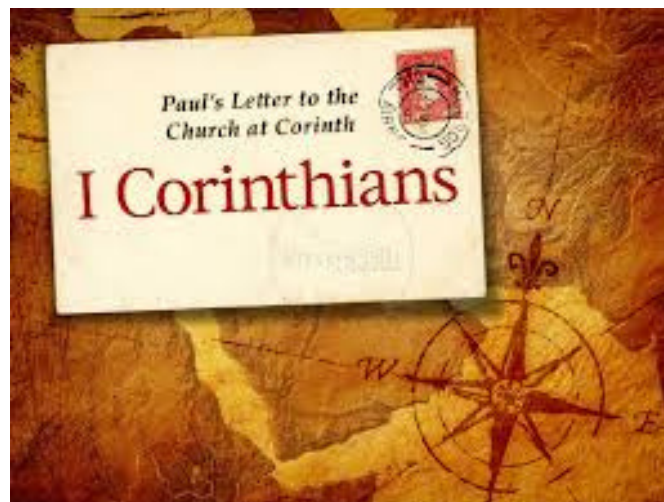
ARE YOU ARGUMENTATIVE?

Today we're going to look at the foolishness of being argumentative. How many of you here argue? Ever? Okay, for the rest of you, I disagree. You do argue, and you say, "No, I don't." I got you now, right?



We're all into this, so let's dig in.

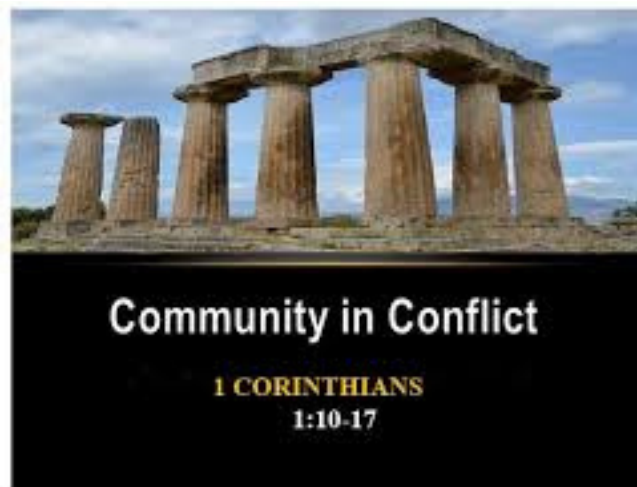
Last week, Duane did a wonderful job. In **chapter 1, verses 1 to 9**, Paul opens with kind, affirming words, thanking God for all the generous gifts that God had given to the church in Corinth. He assumes that they are saved because we note here that these serious, multiple issues that Paul is going to begin addressing in the verses today do not call into question their salvation.



Listen to what he says to the church in Corinth: "He will keep you strong to the end." Speaking to the Corinthians, "He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for He is faithful to do what He says, and He has invited you into partnership with His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Free from all blame on that day, and that is such a profound understanding. As we look at the struggles that this church was involved in, it did not impact their salvation.

But now in verse 10, Paul gets down to brass tacks and begins to address the many problems that need to be corrected in the Corinthian church. David Guzik says this: "There is much in First Corinthians that is unflattering to the Christians. They are shown to have morality problems, doctrine problems, church government problems, spiritual gift problems, church service problems, and authority problems." He says it might be easy for us to think they weren't even saved yet. So, with the Holy Spirit's unction, Paul now begins in verse 10 with problem number one.



Verse 10: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose." For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, "I am a follower." Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Or were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not.



Paul says here, "Stop arguing among yourselves." In Greek, it means to tear, to rent, like a cloth being torn into two halves.

You know, Proverbs makes an interesting point about pride being at the root of arguments. **Proverbs 13:10** says this: "Pride leads to conflict." In the NIV, it says, "Where there is strife, there is pride." Where there is strife, there is pride. Is the Bible true? Yes, that's an easy question to answer. So, is it possible to have an argument without pride driving it? I don't think so.



Now, is it possible to have a discussion without pride? Yes. Is it possible to have a disagreement without pride being present? Yes. But an argument? In an argument, you know, when there's a disagreement, **Matthew 18** says we're to go to that person in private and talk to them gently and humbly, not in pride.

The Bible sometimes refers to arguments as disputations. Disputations. I wrote the following in my Bible many years ago. I didn't note who said it, so I can't give credit to the person who wrote this, but it's good, I think. He said this: "Disputations involve an attitude that cannot keep silent and admire another person's position. Rather, it must always vocalize and criticize. It cannot stand to have its opinion contradicted. It must always be right. It must always be right." Listen again: "Disputations involve an attitude that cannot keep silent and admire another person's position. Rather, it must always vocalize and criticize. It cannot stand to have its opinions contradicted. It must always be right."

There sounds a little prideful in there, and you know the internet fuels this, doesn't it? People get opinions about something, they jump down into that rabbit hole, and they get fed more and more of the same. They come back out of the rabbit hole, and someone else went down a different rabbit hole and comes up convinced they're right. Now they start arguing. It's a whole different world as it relates to arguing because of how the internet feeds those differences.

And just one practical point here on how to help avoid arguments. You often hear someone say, once embroiled in a verbal argument, "Hey, you started it," to the one who first launched the argument. But in actuality, it's not the first person who starts an argument; it's the second person. It's only when the second person responds to the first person's statement that the argument can begin.



Remember, for some reason, that in emotionally charged moments, you're not yourself. You are the sane one at that moment. Don't jump in. Listen, we all have a lot of experience here: your spouse, boyfriend, or classmate says something sharp to you, the wrong thing on the wrong day, and it gets under your skin. What should you do? Don't bite. Be smart and think it through.

It's 5:00 right now, and you know where you want to be with your spouse by 7:00. You know if you bite, it's not going to take you there. Just think it through. Let it go. It's not that important.



And one other thing on this: when someone says something sharp to you, the most convicting thing you can do in that moment is to be silent. Because when you're silent, it acts like a mirror, reflecting back to them what they just said to you. Those strong, harsh words just continue echoing, and that brings conviction to them for what they've said. So your silence accomplishes a lot of good.

Then Paul makes the same point in **verse 10**. He says, "Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church."

You know, over the last 10 to 15 years, I've modified my prayers involving upcoming meetings with individuals or groups. Almost always, I try to remember to pray for unity because attaining scriptural unity indicates that a group or a couple have allowed themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot lead a couple or a group to two contradictory positions. As long as a group's decision is scripturally based, that unity is proof that they've all been cooperating with the Holy Spirit.



And next, problem number one is choosing one preacher over another.

Verses 12 and 13: Some of you are saying, "I'm a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ." Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Or were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not.

The NLT says, "I am a follower of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (Peter)." The New King James says, "I am of Paul." The NASB says, "I am with Paul." Paul shatters this argument by saying in the NIV, ESV, King James, and New King James: "Is Christ divided?" Paul's argument runs like this: Did one Christ send Paul to you, and did another Christ send Apollos to another, and did another Christ send Peter to another? No, one Christ sent each of these teachers to you for your mutual benefit. So why, Paul argues, do you choose one over another when Christ did not choose one over another?



And besides, practically, who is it that teaches you the Bible anyway? It's the Holy Spirit, right? Listen to Paul's words on this subject: "But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meetings, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say, by what the Word says. And as they listen, only the Holy Spirit can do this. A preacher can't do this. As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, 'God is truly here among you.'" Do you hear in those words any emphasis on a teacher? No, it's the Holy Spirit who teaches us.

I remember many years ago sitting next to my wife before we ever started Cornerstone. On a Sunday morning, I was slouched down in the pew with my stony heart, complaining about the preacher who was droning on and on. I was complaining to myself that I wished I was listening to a better speaker. The Lord convicted me powerfully and said to me—not audibly, but in my spirit—"Thom, when you fix your eyes on the instrument, your ears become closed to the Spirit." He said, "Repent of your prideful, critical spirit and instead listen to my Spirit over these next 45 minutes."



I remember after I repented and asked the Lord, He connected me in the Spirit with a powerful message that, if I remember correctly, was completely independent of anything that man said that day. God just gave me a message I never forgot.

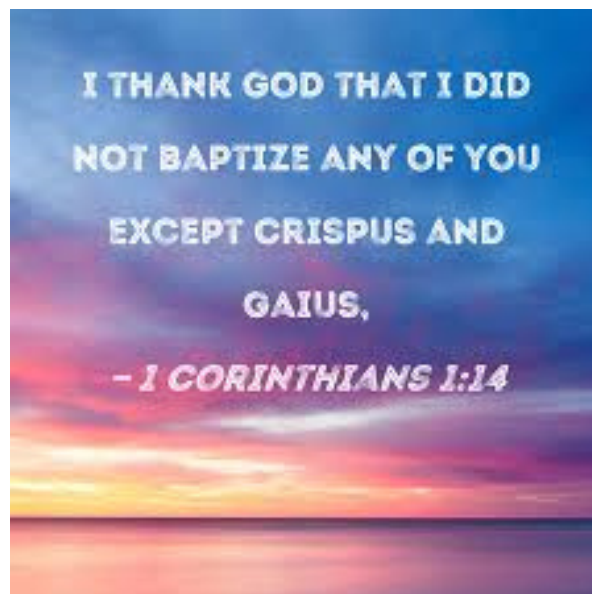


Now, if someone is preaching heresy, you get out. But if it's just something that's not ministering to you, listen to the Holy Spirit. Because here's the truth: if you cannot pray yourself out of your critical spirit as you listen to a teacher, that entire time that you are in his presence listening, you will be guided by your critical spirit instead of the Holy Spirit. Don't forget that.



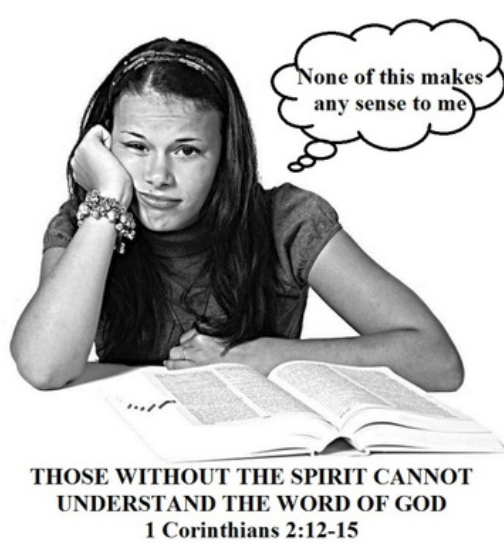
And then Paul continues minimizing the role played by the human instrument God has used in their lives and in our lives.

1 Corinthians 1:13-17: "Has Paul been divided? Has Christ been divided in actions? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say they were baptized in my name. Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanus; but I don't remember baptizing anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the good news – and not with clever speech, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. Now, the point here is not that it would have been wrong, but instead, because he did not baptize more, it gave the Corinthians even less occasion to lift up Paul over another preacher."



Then Paul shifts to the simple message of the cross in **verse 18 and 19**: "The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction, but we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As Scripture says, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.'"

Here is a very practical truth: Listen, the lost cannot understand the gospel, the good news, without the Holy Spirit's enablement. The lost cannot understand the good news, the gospel, without the Holy Spirit.



Later in **Chapter 2**, Paul is going to expand upon this. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them, and they can't understand it. For only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others.

So, there are two points here concerning sharing Christ with your unsaved friends. Number one, pray that they would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. That is absolutely necessary because they can't be saved without the Holy Spirit's drawing them, wooing them, calling them, ministering to them, explaining salvation to them. Second, pray that you would be alert to their sensitivity as you share the gospel with them.



That's made so clear in **2 Corinthians 2:14**. Listen closely: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."

You give off an aroma that both the saved and the unsaved pick up. They smell it, they see it, they're aware of it.

But here's the difference, listen to **verse 16**: "To the one, we are the aroma that brings death; to the other, we are the aroma that brings life. To one, we are the aroma of life leading to life." And this is how you tell if your friend is sensitive to the Holy Spirit when you're ministering to them. Because if you are the aroma of death, because you will be an aroma, you will... If you are the aroma of... And it's like, you know, "Get this out of here. I don't want this. I don't want to hear this."

I remember I did a funeral one time. About four rows back, right in the middle, there was a woman sitting. And I gave the gospel during the funeral. She was about 45 years old, well-dressed, and the entire time I taught, she did a 90-degree turn to that wall, never looked away from that wall. I mean, it was the aroma of death leading to death.

What's your aroma of life leading to life look like? You start sharing the gospel with them, they start leaning in, right? And they kind of turn their head like this, and they maybe ask some questions, but they're open. You can tell the difference. And I take that as a wide-open door. You just keep that train going. Be aware of their sensitivity of life leading to life.

And to this point, does a person have to fully understand the gospel to go to heaven? I'm 70 years old. I've been a preacher for 24 years. I still don't fully understand the gospel. Why would God let His Son die for me? It's crazy, right? Why would He do that?

And again, fully understand the gospel? Yet, unless we come as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom. So, you won't fully understand it. They won't fully understand.



Then **verse 20**: So where does this leave the philosophers or scholars or the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. It looks foolish to us Christians. I call these foolish philosophies. How many know that word "gobbledygook"? It's a big book, but it sure doesn't include all the scriptures and myths.

Gobbledygook

language that is meaningless or is made unintelligible by excessive use of abstruse technical terms; nonsense.

But speaking of Buddha, Buddha's teachings, listen, see if you can make sense of this: "The soul is directed to rely upon the Word of God, i.e., the expression of the truth within, and determine the will in accordance with the same thing. The soul is required to rest upon the Divine reality which underlies the illusions of thought and sense, the expression of the indwelling spirit. The own is the energy output in the soul. The spiritual ego is the will, and union with a higher self is the aim. Union so the lower self merges into the higher self."

I never smoked pot, but in college, I went to parties with a lot of pot smoke, and I can tell you, if you read that during one of those parties, again, "Oh, here's another one: 'This Earth, then, is one brick for Anjai is this Earth. Since it is, therefore, that the whole Anja is built up. Now this Earth is four corners, for the corners are her corners. Hence the bricks are four corners, for all the bricks are after the manner of the Earth.'"

Wow, cool, man. That is really... We hear that as, "I'm out of that senseless world." But instead, Paul says, "The message of the Cross is simple." 1 Corinthians 1:21: "Since God in His wisdom saw to it that the world would never know Him through human wisdom, He has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. The simple message of the Cross saves."

Many years ago, I was on the board of the Seminary in Myerstown, and we had a speaker come in by the name of Akbar Abdul Haq. He was an evangelist in Muslim countries, holding large Crusades there. I'm not sure how he pulled it off, but he did. Eventually, Billy Graham heard about him and asked him to be one of his associates. So, he became associated with the Billy Graham organization.

Sometime later, he was doing a Crusade in a Muslim country, and after the Crusade was over, Akbar, who was a very brilliant man, said to Billy, "How do you think I did?" And Billy said, "Well, just one suggestion. You need to make the message simpler." He said it went back, he rewrote it, took a lot out, added things, made it simple.

Sometime later, I don't remember the timeframe, but sometime later, Billy came to another Crusade, and when it was over, Akbar asked him again, "Billy, I modified my teaching. What did you think?" And Billy said, "You need to make it more simple."

The simple message of the cross. You know, you hear people all the time say about Billy Graham, "I could do a better message. I can prepare a better message than Billy Graham prepared." Well, what drives to the grain? Prayer and the simple message of the cross. He doesn't get caught up.



Then under verse 22, it is foolish to the Jews. The Jews are offended, and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both the Jews and the Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

It is interesting that there are two groups listed here, and the same two groups exist today: the Greeks or the Gentiles, which is everyone other than a Jew, and the second group are the Jews. Paul said that the Gentiles only believe what agrees with their own wisdom.

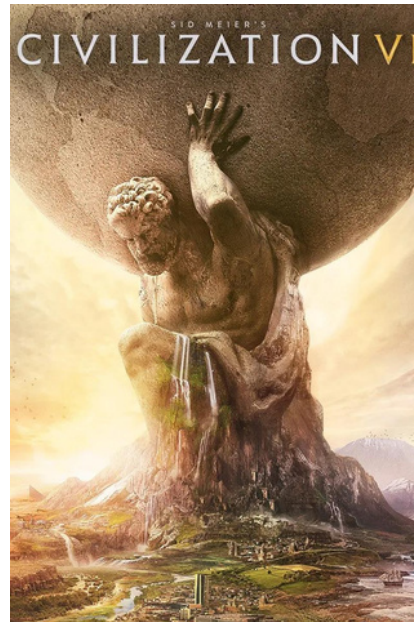
gen·tile
gignere beget
gens family, race
gentilis nation or people
gentile non-Jew

Where does that take you? Dr. Garbutt, in his book Dogmatic Faith, says this of the Roman world, which was a context of the world's wisdom of which Paul is speaking. Listen to what he said about the context of Paul's works: "The Roman world carried human advancement to its highest pitch for luster of genius, brilliancy of wit, fertility of imagination, depth of thought, artistic tasks and skills, and keen relish for pleasure. The Roman civilization has never yet been excelled, never equaled."

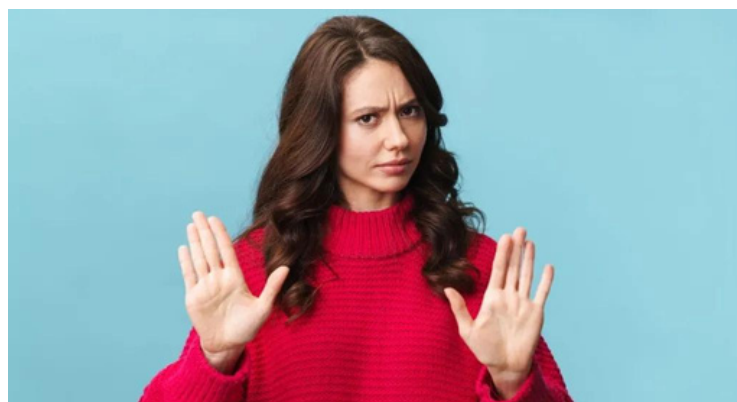
He goes on, "And yet this ancient society, from its own inherent rottenness, its enormous, all-pervading, universal vice, sapped the Roman Empire of virtue. The mass was corrupt to its very core; its strength perished by the mere exhaustion of its vices. Godlessness and vice, irreligion, persecution of religion, and immorality went hand in hand as they always do, until the people, having lost all knowledge of God, also lost all shame and virtue."



We're getting close, and this splendid civilization of the old world perished of its own hopeless and helpless corruption. The less the people knew of God, listen, the less the people knew of God, the viler and more debased they became. And of course, that, folks, is the end game for all civilizations that chase after man's wisdom at the expense of God's wisdom.



So how close are we on that timeline? Of the Jews, the second group, Paul says this in verse 23, and the same is true today. Did you know only 1.9% of Jews by birth are Christian? That is a supernaturally low number, 1.9%. And listen to this: only 26% of Jews say that they believe in God as described in the Bible. Seventy-four percent do not believe in a God as described in the Bible. This is clear evidence affirming Paul's words even to this day; they're offended.



In **2 Corinthians 3:14**, speaking specifically of the Jews, Paul says this: "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, even to this day when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted because only through Christ is it taken away." So once again, without the Holy Spirit's enablement, they will continue to be offended. They will not understand the gospel until they come to it because they want to know the truth.

And then **verse 26**: "Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God."

Now here Paul specifies the background of three groups who, when they come to Christ, he speaks of. First, group one: those who, before Christ, were wise in the world's eyes. The second group are those who, before Christ, were powerful in the world. The third group are those who, before Christ, were wealthy. The wise, the powerful, the wealthy.



Now why are these anomalies, you say? Doesn't God call everyone to faith? Yes, He certainly does. So why do so few from these three specific groups respond to God's call? I think the reason is because a man's ambition, in full bloom, is rewarded with the world's acclaim, prestige, power, and money, and it becomes that man's drug of choice. And as you know, no addict will ever give up a drug until they want to, and this group rarely wants to.

Members of that group should find themselves inserted in the story of the rich young ruler. You know the story: Jesus gives him a list of things, and he says, "From a child, I've kept all of those." Jesus said, "You lack just one thing. Sell all that you have, give the money to the poor, and come follow me." And then some of the saddest words in the Bible: it says, "And the man went sadly away. He was very rich." You know, and Matthew had asked this question, "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Some won't give up the acclaim of wisdom they receive from their peers at the university level because they believe in creation, not evolution. And they won't give up that peer admiration. Some won't give it up because of the wealth that they have, and where they have to give all of that up, and all the prestige that comes with that. The powerful would have to step out of that. It's a drug of choice.

Now, one really cute point here in **verse 26**: the King James says, "Not many noble are called." I thought this was Queen Elizabeth I who said this, but it turns out it was Lady Huntington, who was a true believer among the English nobility and was a personal friend of George Whitefield. She said that she is going to be able to go to heaven today because of the letter 'm,' because the Bible did not say "not any noble" but "not many." That letter 'm' saved her from "any" to "not many."



And then verse 30: "God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit, God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, 'If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.'"

Three points here:

1. God alone has made your salvation possible. Never forget, you do not and never will contribute anything to your salvation. Your salvation is a gift from God, start to finish.
2. Jesus alone is the one who makes you acceptable to God. You do not make yourself more acceptable to God by all the good works that you do, by your prayers, by your offerings, or by your Bible reading. Will all of those things bless your life? Absolutely, but they will not make God love you more. On your best day, he loves you to the max; on your worst day, he loves you to the max. How does that sound to you? Pretty good.
3. He, Jesus, made you pure and holy. You are already pure and holy. We'll look at that in just a moment.



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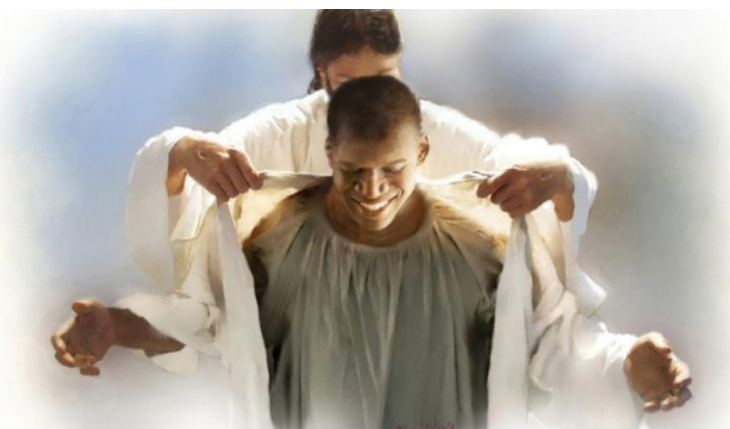
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3. He, Jesus, made you pure and holy. You are already pure and holy. We'll look at that in just a moment.

So how does today's lesson apply to me? First of all, number one: He made you pure and holy, past tense. Consider the context. Paul is saying this to the members of the Corinthian Church, who have a lot of problems and failures. You are already pure and holy. Do you have a lot of problems and failures? I do. I'm sure glad. I take comfort because positionally, God sees you, if you're in Christ, as always being pure and holy. Even though, like the Corinthians, you and I still have a good bit of cleaning up to do.



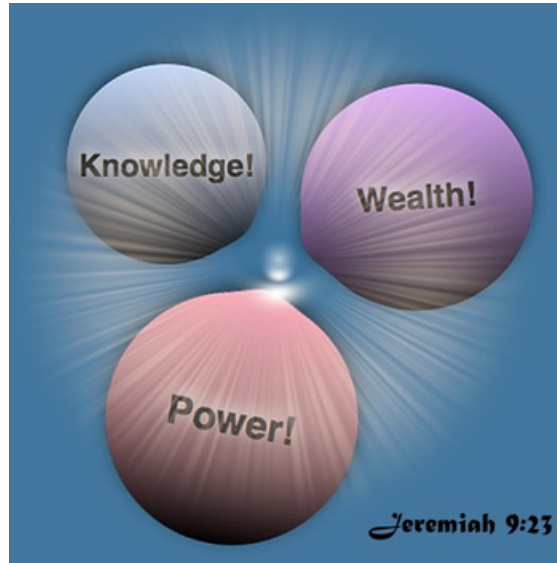
I love **Hebrews 10:14**. I have often quoted this, but it's so powerful: one sentence that makes both points. "For by that one offering, by Christ's death on the cross, he forever made perfect those who are being made holy." You are forever made perfect; you're perfect, but yet at the same time, he's making you holy. Why does someone need to be made holy if they are already perfect? Because positionally, you are perfect; in reality, I still need to be cleaned up a lot. But he sees me as perfect, he sees you as perfect. Do we deserve that? No. You know what we deserve, don't you? We're not going to go there, but that's what we get from God. You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. So get this, folks: try to keep this image in your mind. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus. How does that feel? Wow. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus because you are clothed in his righteousness.



I've often said this is so critical to your relationship with God being what God wants it to be. Because if you can get yourself to that understanding, that he sees you already perfected in Christ, that he loves you the same way he loves Jesus, you will feel comfortable going into his presence. But I guarantee you, if you start thinking anything else, you will tremble at the thought of appearing before the throne. And he knows that gets in the way of the relationship, and that's why this is so important for him, that you believe this. Because this is what takes the wall down, the wall of separation. This is what allows you to come into the throne room like a grandchild and jump in his arms, certain he wants to see you. Right? Critically important.

The second application: If I made the decision to know nothing—that is, to forgo philosophical or theological discussions regarding inconsequential things and opinions—while among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified, and the meaning of his redemptive, substitutionary death and his resurrection (Amplified Bible). Don't complicate the simple gospel message when witnessing to people. We throw the seed; it's God that makes it grow.

The last application: If you are affected, impacted, influenced by social media, or if you are one who finds value, significance, and identity in the world's opinion of your intellect, your position, or your possessions, consider the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, who echoes Paul's thoughts. **Jeremiah 9:23**: "This is what the Lord says: 'Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord.'"



Because here is the truth: the Bible says that a man is a slave to whatever controls him. And if you are a slave, if you are bent or you are affected, if you are impacted by what social media says about you or how it makes you feel, if you are impacted by the esteem and the tribute, then they control you, and you are a slave to them. How do you correct that? You decide that you're going to play to an audience of one—just one—Jesus. That's it. His opinion is the only opinion that matters. And if the world's opinion of me is different than Jesus', guess who's wrong? The world, right? You know how you become a well-balanced person? You know how you become a well-balanced person? By social media? Teach them that the only thing that they really need to be focused on is what Jesus thinks of them, and they'll get through life just fine. They will. The only opinion—play to an audience of one, Jesus.

