

Week 4: False Love Divides - 1 Cor 4:17-6:12

Pre-Work

- The Story of Israel (Jacob) is part of a broader narrative that has already been well established. For a refresher on the first 11 chapters of Genesis, which function as a primer for how to read the rest of the Bible, please watch this video on Genesis 1-11 from The Bible Project.
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1-11/>
- An important part of understanding biblical narrative (and oh but we have a lot of biblical narrative to go over for the next 19 weeks!) is “setting”. To the biblical authors, “setting” is not merely where the events of the narrative take place, but it is also an important canvas on which they can paint a picture that supports themes and ideas related to that setting in the future. Please watch this video from The Bible Project to understand the use of “Setting” in the Bible more clearly.
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/setting-biblical-narrative/>

Class Notes

The abundance and freedom mindset vs the scarcity and restriction mindset

The “personal rights” mindset vs the “mission responsibility” mindset

Today’s lesson is focused on the second of five essays Paul writes to communicate to the Corinthians regarding the theme of their divisiveness and immaturity in the faith.

Scriptural image: the misuse of sex is set on analogy to the misuse of worship.

This class time will focus on giving you tools for comparative textual study rather than “just telling you what it means”.

One important chiasm informs our excerpting this essay:

A - Timothy’s example will remind you of Paul’s ways and teachings - 4:17

B - Arrogance and speech are not the kingdom of God - 4:18-20

C - Would you rather have discipline or love? - 4:21

D - Remove the incestuous man - 5:1-2

E - The rescue plan for the incestuous man - 5:3-5

F - Central axis - Christ our Passover creates sacred space - 5:6-8

E’ - The rescue plan for the sinners of this world - 5:9-10

D’ - Remove false brethren - 5:11-15

C’ - Would you rather do wrong before pagan courts or be defrauded by a brother? - 6:1-7

B’ - Unrighteous ways are excluded from the kingdom of God - 6:9-11

A’ - Paul’s ways clarified - 6:12

A - Timothy’s example will remind you of my ways and teachings (*this cameo is thematically related to the clarification of Paul’s ways in 6:12*)

17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

- In 4:16, Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to “imitate” Paul as a child imitates a father. This is why he is sending Timothy
- Their spiritual pride will be offset by the example of Paul through his disciple
- “Ways in Christ, just as I teach” - This letter is not the ultimate corrective for the Church in Corinth, but rather the life “in Christ” that Paul lives.

B - Arrogance and speech are not the kingdom of God - 4:18-20 (*this cameo is thematically related to how unrighteous ways are excluded from the Kingdom of God in 6:9-11*)

18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. **19** But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. **20** For the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power.

- Greco-Roman culture emphasis on status and rhetoric
- Here Paul contrasts the clever use and manipulation of “words” (logo) with “power” (dunamis). The power of a cruciform life is the Kingdom of God, not speeches.

“Some have expressed concern that Paul appears to be undoing what he has been arguing earlier (esp. 1:18–2:5 and 3:5–4:13), about the servant nature of his gospel and his own ministry. But that is a false fear, and misses the point of this text. The gospel of Christ crucified in all of its apparent weakness is nonetheless the power of God unto salvation for those who believe. Paul is not challenging the arrogant, therefore, on their grounds, but on his own. What their present stance lacks is the true power of the Spirit, which gives people birth to new life in Christ (v. 15), which can change people’s lives—can “take the poor lost sinner, lift him from the miry clay and set him free,” as the gospel song has it.”

” ~Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Commentary on the New Testament*

C - Would you rather have discipline or love? - 4:21 (*this cameo is thematically related to the question of “would you rather shame the church before the pagan courts or suffer wrong by a brother?”*)

21 What do you desire? That I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

- Arrogant words from the Corinthians would invite a “rod” of worldly harsh speech from Paul
- Instead, by sending Timothy to remind them of Paul’s living example and ways of approaching the gospel, and in his future visit, Paul offers them an opportunity to receive his love and gentleness...which is the “way” he lives.

Chapter 5

D - Remove the incestuous man - 5:1-2 (*this cameo is related thematically to the removal of false brethren in 5:11-15*)

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and sexual immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, *namely*, that someone has his father’s wife. **2** You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

- The report likely comes from Chloe’s messengers, not from the letter from Corinth asking questions
- Sleeping with a father’s wife carries power-play connotations in the Torah, and is also abhorred in ancient Greco-Roman society because of the threat to the social fabric of the tyrannical “Pater Familia”
- Why would they boast and not mourn?
 - One scenario
 - Freedom over responsibility
 - Rights over mission

E - The rescue plan for the incestuous man - 5:3-5 (*this cameo is thematically related to the rescue plan for the sinners of this world in 5:9-10*)

3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. **4** In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, **5** *I have decided to turn such a person over to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.*

- Paul is not looking to hear out the circumstances; he adjudicates on the basis of the broader mission and the need to rescue the individual
- Note that nothing is said relating to the woman involved

- The “rescue/servant” power of Jesus means the Satan can have at it with this man to destroy the “sarx” in order to ultimately save him spiritually.
- The deliverance through judgment design pattern (exile): Exile in Egypt, Babylonian Exile, Jonah’s Exile

F - Central axis - Christ our Passover creates sacred space - 5:6-8 *(This central axis of the whole section should provide the interpretative lens on how we compare the following cameos to their corresponding cameos previously read)*

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? **7** Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. **8** Therefore let’s celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- The bigger problem is the bragging of the church over the “power play” success of the man who achieved the status of Pater Familia by sleeping with his dad’s wife. This is a mishandling of what it means to be free.
- Boasting over a power play has infected the whole Corinthian church, which explains the divisions, arguments, and belief that they are more spiritual than others
- Passover - deliverance of God’s people while still in exile by means of the blood of the lamb.
- On the night the just recompense of the Egyptians was taking place, would malice and wickedness be appropriate of God’s people? Or sincerity and truth?

E` - The rescue plan for the sinners of this world - 5:9-10 *(The message of Passover is freedom from the powers to live in a new creation as a pattern of rescue for all the families of the earth - this corresponds to the rescue plan for the incestuous man in 5:3-5)*

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; **10** I did not at all mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world.

- The Corinthians misunderstood Paul’s previous instruction to not associate with the immoral as not associating with immoral unbelievers. Jesus repeatedly associated with immoral unbelievers - the sexually immoral, the greedy, swindlers, and pagans....loving these people is why the Corinthian Church is in the world.

They are under the rule of the “powers and principalities”, primarily the Statan, which means they are the ones in need of New Creation life and the rescue plan God initiated in Jesus.

D` - Remove false brethren - 5:11-15 *(This cameo is thematically related to the removal of the incestuous man in 5:1-2)*

11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person. **12** For what business of mine is it to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? **13** But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE EVIL PERSON FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

- Those who misrepresent New Creation by wallowing in the chains of sin have not yet entered New Creation. The Kingdom of God is not just a belief system it is a cruciform life. How will any be saved if the church in Corinth is less righteous than pagan society?
- Judge within, not without - “Remove the evil person” - Deut 24:7, relating to kidnapping.
- Removal of the evil person, for example the verbally abusive person, is for their “deliverance through exile” and for the efficacy of the church’s testimony among the lost.

Chapter 6

C` - Would you rather do wrong before pagan courts or be defrauded by a brother? - 6:1-7 *(This cameo is thematically related to Paul’s question about whether they would rather he come to them with love or with love and a spirit of gentleness in 4:21)*

1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? **2** Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to form* the smallest law courts? **3** Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? **4** So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them *as judges* who are of no account in the church? **5** I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you anyone wise who will be able to decide between his brothers *and sisters*, **6** but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather suffer the wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? **8** On the contrary, you yourselves do wrong and defraud. And this to *your* brothers *and* sisters!

- **Deuteronomy 32:8 worldview**
- Civil disputes, not rebellion against government authorities
- Greco-Roman courts (weighted towards status and power plays) vs the modern system
- Use the spirit of gentleness with one another rather than bringing in the “rod” of the powers
- If your sister steals your shampoo do you call the police?

B' - Unrighteous ways are excluded from the kingdom of God - 6:9-11 (*This cameo is thematically related to the exclusion of “arrogance and words” from the Kingdom of God in 4:18-20*)

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, **10** nor thieves, nor *the* greedy, nor those habitually drunk, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

- **Why go to the pagan courts for Kingdom matters when they are packed with those who aren't presently inheriting the Kingdom?**
 - Immorality and idolatry and adultery: false worship and false sex
 - Effeminate and men who take other men to bed: malakoi oute arsenokoitai/ receivers and the sexually dominant in the widespread custom of pederasty
 - Thieves, greedy, verbal abusers, swindlers
- Are these people equipped to judge your disputes?
- Some of you WERE similarly trapped, but now being washed, set apart as holy, and in right standing with God in the Trinity,

A' - Paul's ways clarified - 6:12 (*This final cameo in the chiasm is thematically related to Paul's sending of Timothy to remind the Corinthian church of Paul's “ways and teachings” in 6:12*)

12 All things are permitted for me, but not all things are of benefit. All things are permitted for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

- “All things are permitted for me” - Paul quoting their letter to him (2x), in which they are throwing Paul’s words back at him to justify their behavior
- Paul does not deny that all things are permitted for him - but why do what is not beneficial or spiritually imprisoning? With great freedom comes great responsibility.
- How to navigate freedom and responsibility is what Paul wants Timothy to model, as he models Paul, as Paul models Christ.

Reflections