

## **Week 3: Spiritual Wisdom Erases Division - 1 Cor 2:3 - 4:16**

### **Pre-Work**

- In Chapters 2:3 to 4:16, Paul addresses the problem of the Corinthian church's self-focused divisiveness and spiritual competitiveness more fully, by giving them multiple explanations of the nature of true spirituality. The governing principle? "The last shall be first". Some folks think Jesus introduced this concept, but biblically, Jesus was clarifying a theme that begins in the Old Testament. Please watch this powerful video tracing this theme throughout the scriptures (the video is only about 5 minutes)

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/last-will-be-first/>

- Please read 1 Corinthians 2:3 to 4:16 in the translation of your choice. What attitudes do you think Paul is calling out in the Corinthian church?

## Class Notes

- Brief recap on the divisiveness of the Corinthian church as opposed to the gospel and the cross

**3** I also was with you in weakness and fear, and in great trembling, **4** and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of mankind, but on the power of God.

- Paul's year and a half living with the Corinthians was characterized by humility, not lording over them or persuading through rhetoric or words
- His "message" was demonstrating spirituality and dunamis/miraculous power, so that their loyalty to Jesus would not depend on human rationale but the miracle of God's power: exhibited in weakness.

**6** Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; **7** but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

- True wisdom does not conform to the "age" and its rulers, who are on the way out
- Deuteronomy 32:8 worldview and the kingdoms of this world
- The inauguration of the Kingdom of God
- The ways of the Kingdom are a mystery to the corrupt powers of the age and their puppets, but predestined by God to fuel the lights of the city on a hill.

**8** *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; **9** but just as it is written:

“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,  
AND *WHICH* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HUMAN HEART,  
ALL THAT **GOD** HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”

- If the powers understood what Jesus’ enthronement on the cross would mean for them, they would not have attacked.
- Paul combines several Hebrew Bible passages including from Isaiah 52 and Isaiah 64. As a whole these chapters and everything in between expose the nature of the coming King and God’s rescue plan for humanity, but the corrupt spiritual powers either did not believe or did not understand.

**10** For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. **11** For who among people knows the *thoughts* of a person except the spirit of the person that is in him? So also the *thoughts* of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God. **13** We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.

- Paul and all believers can understand the meaning of the scriptures (how the Hebrew Bible foreshadows Jesus and His teachings) via the Spirit of God, not the spirit of the world.
- The Corinthians believed they were highly spiritual, but their lifestyle of promoting themselves and looking down on others showed something else...

**14** But a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. **15** But the one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is discerned by no one. **16** FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

- Those who are caught up in the principles of the world (ambition, success by means of lording it over others and fame) cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God, because those things are opposite.
- A truly spiritual person emulates Jesus in love and service, which is incomprehensible to anyone who buys into the world’s system.
- As believers, we have and ought to have the mindset of the Messiah (the last shall be first)

## Chapter 3

**1** And I, brothers *and sisters*, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but *only* as fleshly, as to infants in Christ. **2** I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to consume it*. But even now you are not yet able, **3** for you are still fleshly.

- The Corinthian believers are still living in the mindset of the corrupt spiritual powers, the “natural way”.
- Milk not solid food -
- They still cannot digest spiritual food, so Paul will have to give them specific rules instead. If they understood the cruciform life of “fighting for the bottom”, Paul could speak to them differently.

For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like *ordinary* people? **4** For when one person says, “I am with Paul,” and another, “I *am* with Apollos,” are you not *ordinary* people?

- This is the evidence, thanks to the report from Chloe’s team, that they are living the natural way of hell and not the way of Christ.

**5** What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. **7** So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. **8** Now the one who plants and the one who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **9** For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

- Apollos and Paul are *servants* working the garden of God. That’s all, not demigods to gather followers. Y’all are a garden and a temple building - we just are here to work and keep it.

**10** According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each person must be careful how he builds on it. **11** For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, **13** each one's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one's work. **14** If anyone's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet *only* so as through fire.

- The primary original meaning of this is corporate. Paul was assigned to lay the foundation of the church at Corinth; Apollo is building on it. But some want to build fleshly wisdom of self-focus and divisiveness and personal success on the foundation of Christ crucified. All that will burn like wood, hay, and straw.
- Gold, silver, and precious stones are the Matthew 5-7 life, the cruciform life, the "last will be first" life, and they will remain through recurring instances of tribulation as well as an ultimate refining.

**16** Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? **17** If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

- The meaning of a temple
- "Y'all" are the temple - the corporate community of Christ. If any single person destroys the corporate temple (by living according to the age's dictates of self-promotion and ambition and divisiveness), that individual will also be destroyed by God. God will hand him over to the very thing he is doing to the Body of Christ.
- The true Temple is set apart, and I'm talking about y'all

**18** *Take care that* no one deceives himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. **19** For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God. For it is written: "*He is* THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE BY THEIR CRAFTINESS"; **20** and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE THOUGHTS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE useless."

- Does someone think he is wise? He needs to embrace the "foolishness" of the gospel (the King of the Universe humbled Himself to a cross to save us - live like that), and then wisdom is within reach.
- Fleshly wisdom is useless.

**21** So then, no one is to be boasting in people. For all things belong to you, **22** whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, **23** and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

- Stop bragging about who your favorite gardener is, or what you think the future holds, or anything in life or death - when you belong to Jesus, you belong to God, and all these things are His anyway, and therefore already yours.

## Chapter 4

**1** This is the way *any* person is to regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

- Is this clear? We are just servants and stewards - don't make us lords

**2** In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. **3** But to me it is an insignificant matter that I would be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. **4** For I am not aware of anything against myself; however I am not vindicated by this, but the one who examines me is the Lord. **5** Therefore do not go on passing judgment before *the* time, *but wait* until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *human* hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God.

- From this we can deduce that some factions were finding faults with Paul. Paul was not one of the original 12. His personal meeting with Jesus - was it just a vision or reality? He persecuted the church. He's not a good speaker. He is a blue collar laborer. He keeps getting shipwrecked and left for dead. He refuses to get a regular salary for ministry. In an honor-shame culture, Paul is the opposite of successful.
- Whatever accusations they have against Paul, he advises them to let the Lord sort it out. He's on a mission.

**6** Now these things, brothers *and sisters*, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos on your account, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. **7** For who considers you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

- The gardening and construction worker metaphors Paul applied to himself and Apollos serve as examples to how the Corinthians should see themselves: don't consider themselves higher than gardeners or builders. They are not lords or lawyers or anything like that in the Spirit...all their knowledge and gifts were not earned, but received.
- Now Paul employs sarcasm:

**8** You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, *I* wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you! **9** For I think, God has exhibited us, the apostles, last of all as men condemned to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to mankind. **10** We are fools on account of Christ, but you are prudent in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are without honor!

- Paul's hope is that when he spells out their arrogance, they will hear how ridiculous it sounds.

**11** Up to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed and roughly treated and homeless; **12** and we labor, working with our own hands; when we are verbally abused, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure *it*; **13** when we are slandered, we reply as friends; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.

- Paul and Apollos and others exhibit the cruciform life. They could have very nice things, but they don't want to make a spectacle of themselves. They have every right to be fully financially compensated in ministry, but they support themselves with "dishonorable" occupations. They respond to slander with friendship, they bless when they are attacked. To this world, they are scum and dregs.

**14** I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. **15** For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have* many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. **16** Therefore I urge you, be imitators of me.

- The shocker: as a young child imitates his dad, imitate me in what I just wrote to you all in the sentences above. *Then* you will begin to become wise and spiritual and ready to rule in the Kingdom of Heaven.

"When Paul calls his hearers to imitate the father figure, he is employing a traditional patriarchal image. Yet, as Dale Martin has observed, 'He uses patriarchal rhetoric to make an anti-patriarchal point'. He is calling on the strong and wise Corinthians to become weak, to renounce their positions of privilege. Paul himself as the father has modeled the way of renouncing power and comfort for the sake of the gospel. Paul's use of this traditional motif is charged with paradox and creative energy that seeks to overturn the status quo rather than underwrite it."

~Richard B. Hayes, *First Corinthians, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*

## Reflections