

Week 2: The Divisions of Darkness and the Power of God - 1 Cor 1:10-2:2

Pre-Work

- In these verses from 1 Corinthians, Paul points to the “gospel” and to the “cross” as corrective measures for the horrific sin of divisiveness that resulted from the self-promoting attitude of the Corinthian church. And what, exactly, did the cross and the gospel mean to Paul in this context? Please watch the video below in preparation for our class. If you see this explanation in your mind as we study 1 Cor 1:10-2:2, you will see how profound Paul’s argument must have been to them.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/gospel-kingdom/>

- Please read 1 Corinthians 1:10-2:2 in the translation of your choice. What do you think Paul is doing with the ideas of “wisdom” and “foolishness”, “strength” and “weakness”?

Class Notes

- Divisiveness in the scriptures/power plays
 - In the first and second generations Gen 3-4
 - Korah's Rebellion Numbers 16
 - Gideon's son Abimelech in Judges 9
 - Rehoboam and Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 12
- In almost every biblical instance, divisiveness is connected with either protecting or promoting one's self

10 Now I urge you, brothers *and sisters*, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

- The eradication of social layers and other divisions in the community of Christ
- The reality of Greco-Roman culture

11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers *and sisters*, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

- Paul is answering a letter written by the Corinthian church, but they left out some important things. Chloe's team filled in the gaps.
- Implications of "Chloe's people"
- "Brothers and sisters"/Gr. "adelphoi"
- "Quarrels" - Gr. "eris" - striving against others because of a posture of self-driven personal prestige
- This word appears in other letters of the NT in lists of sins right alongside murder, sorcery, sexual obsession, and hatred.

What was the source of these evil "quarrels"?

12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am with Paul,” or “I *am* with Apollos,” or “I *am* with Cephas,” or “I *am* with Christ.” **13** Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he?

- The Corinthians were dividing themselves into separate teams based upon their favorite leader or speaker.
- “I am with Christ” - one team pulled a power move of super spirituality by saying they are on “Christ’s team”, thus making Jesus Himself an excuse for their supposedly superior spiritual status and leverage in their arguments.
- To authentically be with Christ means to understand what the crucified Jesus does to our community- it erases divisiveness

Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? **14** I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one would say you were baptized in my name! **16** But I did baptize the household of Stephanas also; beyond that, I do not know if I baptized anyone else.

- The scriptural significance of baptism: new creation in Christ and erasure of living by the world’s standards of how we treat God and others
- Apparently some in Corinth were bragging about who baptized them and aligning that person with their debate team

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made of no effect.

- Baptizing people is not leadership - to proclaim the good news is leadership
- What is this “gospel”? Welcome to the rest of 1 Corinthians
- “Not with cleverness of speech” - rhetoric in the Greco-Roman world and argumentation in the rabbinical tradition
- “...so that the cross of Christ would be of no effect” - if Paul’s preaching was clever and better than anyone’s, that would cancel out the cultural point of the cross: to be the least, to serve all, to put others first as the means of saving others and overcoming Hell’s power in the world order.

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written:

“I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF THOSE WHO HAVE UNDERSTANDING, I WILL CONFOUND.”

- Our community is saved through the corporate cruciform life, not fleshly power plays over who is more spiritual or who is right on inconsequential issues
- “Wisdom” by the world’s standards, serpentine wisdom, has an expiration date. The foolishness of the cross which spreads the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5-7) is the “dunamis”/power/miracle of God.
- Quotes Isaiah 29, a reference meant to cause the reader to upload the whole poem:

13 The Lord says:

*“These people come near to me with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
Their worship of me
is based on merely human rules they have been taught.*

*14 Therefore once more I will astound these people
with wonder upon wonder;
the wisdom of the wise will perish,
the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”*

*15 Woe to those who go to great depths
to hide their plans from the LORD,
who do their work in darkness and think,
“Who sees us? Who will know?”*

~Isaiah 29:13-15

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. **22** For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; **23** but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness,

- Paul is calling out their supposed “wisdom” in spiritual things because they have shown by their quarrels that they do not understand at all.
- Christ crucified is not an idea that is compatible with Jewish expectations or Greek wisdom.

24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than mankind, and the weakness of God is stronger than mankind.

- By uniting both Jews and non-Jews into the stream of chosen-ness, God has upended the cosmos with divine wisdom and power
- What is foolish to humans (the cross) and what is weak to humans (the cross), God has displayed true wisdom and strength. Live. That. Out.
- V25 is one of the main thesis statements flavoring the rest of the letter.

26 For consider your calling, brothers *and sisters*, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; **27** but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, **28** and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, **29** so that no human may boast before God.

- As evidence of their cruciform calling, he reminds them of their social position before they were called: mostly foolish, weak, insignificant, despised.
- For the “light of the world” and “city on a hill” to be composed of the marginalized is the pattern set by Jesus in Matthew 4-5.

30 But *it is* due to Him *that* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, **31** so that, just as it is written: “LET THE ONE WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

- Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:23-24 here, where Jeremiah prophesies the future exile of Judah because they have followed the ways of Baal and not the ways of the Lord

23 *This is what the LORD says:*

*“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,*

24 *but let the one who boasts boast about this:
that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,”
declares the LORD. - Jer 9:23-24*

- If the Corinthian believers really are “in Christ”, then they are immersed in the wisdom of the cross, in doing right by God and others, by being set apart, by redemption - that’s living a life that boasts in the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

Chapter 2

1 And when I came to you, brothers *and sisters*, I did not come as *someone* superior in speaking ability or wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God. **2** For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

- Paul is calling as a witness his own behavior and attitude when he lived among them for over a year (Acts 18). To “know nothing among you except Christ Jesus and him crucified” refers here to how Paul applied his “knowledge” into a cruciform lifestyle.

"The problem in Corinth was partly that many if not most of the Corinthian Christians were not fully socialized into the *ekklesia*. They had not fully understood what it meant to be saved by and to live by grace, but rather continued to dance to the piper that played the favorite cultural tune about social advancement through hard work, wealth, rhetoric, and the like. In an honor-shame culture *public* recognition and standing is more important than the actual facts about one's life and accomplishments. In such an environment Paul's gospel must have come as a shock to many."~Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*

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