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Preface

Welcome to our study on 1 Corinthians! I never want to miss an opportunity to express my joy in serving our Lord alongside each of you at Second Baptist. Every week you go above and beyond to minister to your classes through teaching and fellowship. We have an amazing discipleship ministry and you are the very backbone of that success. So thank you for everything that you do. As Paul says in Philippians 1:3, I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you. Please know that I am weekly praying for you. You are my heroes!

Over the next three months we will walk through every verse of this wonderful letter in our Life Groups and Sunday Morning sermons. You will receive a Leader Guide like this one again in March and in April. At the conclusion of this series, which will carry us through May, we will return to the Explore the Bible curriculum.

This curriculum is built around commentary and discussion questions. The intention of the commentary is to be practical in nature. The focus is not only on what the verses are saying, but more specifically on how we can apply them to our daily lives. Most lessons will include challenges to you and your class to think through how you can put into action the principles you learn each week. Our goal as the discipleship ministry at Second Baptist Church is To Follow Jesus and to Lead Others to Follow Jesus. I believe we achieve that goal through faithful Bible study strengthened by life application resulting in life change. I hope you will find this curriculum to be helpful in encouraging your class and yourself to put into practice what is taught each week.

I would greatly value your input on this curriculum. If you have suggestions for how I can improve the content or how I can make it more practical for you, please contact me at pastorsamcoleman@gmail.com . I want this literature to be as helpful as possible as you prepare to minister to your class each week.

Again thank you for your dedication to your ministry. May the Lord bless you and your class as you walk through the book of 1 Corinthians!

Your brother in Christ,

Sam Coleman

Introduction

TITLE

The letter is named for the city of Corinth, where the church to whom it was written was located. With the exception of personal epistles addressed to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, all Paul's letters bear the name of the city where the church addressed existed.

AUTHOR AND DATE

As indicated in the first verse, the epistle was written by the Apostle Paul, whose authorship cannot be seriously questioned. Pauline authorship has been universally accepted by the church since the first century, when 1 Corinthians was penned. Internally, the apostle claimed to have written the epistle (1:1, 13; 3:4-6; 4:15; 16:21). Externally, this correspondence has been acknowledged as genuine since A.D. 95 by Clement of Rome, who was writing to the Corinthian church. Other early Christian leaders who authenticated Paul as author include Ignatius (ca. A.D. 110), Polycarp (ca. A.D. 135), and Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200).

This epistle was most likely written in the first half of A.D. 55 from Ephesus (16:8, 9, 19) while Paul was on his third missionary journey. The apostle intended to remain on at Ephesus to complete his 3 year stay (Acts 20:31) until Pentecost (May/June) A.D. 55 (16:8). Then he hoped to winter (A.D. 55-56) at Corinth (16:6; Acts 20:2). His departure for Corinth was anticipated even as he wrote (4:19; 11:34; 16:8).

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

The city of Corinth was located in southern Greece, in what was the Roman province of Achaia, ca. 45 miles W from Athens. This lower part, the Peloponnesus, is connected to the rest of Greece by a 4-mile-wide isthmus, which is bounded on the E by the Saronic Gulf and on the W by the Gulf of Corinth. Corinth is near the middle of the isthmus and is prominently situated on a high plateau. For many centuries, all N-S land traffic in that area had to pass through or near this ancient city. Since travel by sea around the Peloponnesus involved a 250 mile voyage that was dangerous and obviously time consuming, most captains carried their ships on skids or rollers across the isthmus directly past Corinth. Corinth understandably prospered as a major trade city, not only for most of Greece but for much of the Mediterranean area, including North Africa, Italy, and Asia Minor.

The Isthmian games, one of the two most famous athletic events of that day (the other being the Olympian games), was hosted by Corinth, causing more people-traffic. Even by the pagan standards of its own culture, Corinth became so morally corrupt that its very name became synonymous with debauchery and moral depravity. To "corinthianize" came to represent gross immorality and drunken debauchery.

Like most ancient Greek cities, Corinth had an acropolis (literally, "a high city"), which rose 2,000 feet and was used both for defense and for worship. The most prominent edifice on the acropolis was a temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Some 1,000 priestesses, who were "religious" prostitutes, lived and worked there and came down into the city in the evening to offer their services to male citizens and foreign visitors.

The church in Corinth was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1ff.). As usual, his ministry began in the synagogue, where he was assisted by two Jewish believers, Priscilla and Aquila, with whom he lived for a while and who were fellow tradesmen. Soon after, Silas and Timothy joined them and Paul began preaching even more intensely in the synagogue. When most of the Jews resisted the gospel, he

left the synagogue, but not before Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, his family, and many other Corinthians were converted (Acts 18:5-8).

After ministering in Corinth for over a year and a half (Acts 18:11), Paul was brought before a Roman tribunal by some of the Jewish leaders. Because the charges were strictly religious and not civil, the proconsul, Gallio, dismissed the case. Shortly thereafter, Paul took Priscilla and Aquila with him to Ephesus. From there he returned to Israel (vv. 18-22).

Unable to fully break with the culture from which it came, the church at Corinth was exceptionally factional, showing its carnality and immaturity. After the gifted Apollos had ministered in the church for some time, a group of his admirers established a clique and had little to do with the rest of the church. Another group developed that was loyal to Paul, another claimed special allegiance to Peter (Cephas), and still another to Christ alone (see 1:10-13; 3:1-9).

The most serious problem of the Corinthian church was worldliness, an unwillingness to divorce the culture around them. Most of the believers could not consistently separate themselves from their old, selfish, immoral, and pagan ways. It became necessary for Paul to write to correct this, as well as to command the faithful Christians not only to break fellowship with the disobedient and unrepentant members, but to put those members out of the church (5:9-13).

Before he wrote this inspired letter, Paul had written the church other correspondence (see 5:9), which was also corrective in nature. Because a copy of that letter has never been discovered, it has been referred to as "the lost epistle." There was another non-canonical letter after 1 Corinthians, usually called "the severe letter" (2 Cor. 2:4).

Overview

DATE	LIFE GROUPS	SERMON
March 4	1 Corinthians 1:4-9 Called: To Be Thankful	1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Divided: The Power of One
March 11	1 Corinthians 2:1-16 Divided: The Power of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 3:1-17 Grow: In Maturity
March 18	1 Corinthians 3:18-4:7 Grow: In Humility	1 Corinthians 4:8-21 Grow: In Submission
March 25	1 Corinthians 5:1-8 Judgment: Church Discipline	1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11 Judgment: Immorality & Lawsuits

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

CALLED: TO BE THANKFUL

MARCH 4, 2018

Turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, green bean casserole, family and football. Just thinking of those words reminds us of Thanksgiving: a time to gather our families, enjoy fellowship and food, and reflect on the blessings of God in our lives.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR THANKSGIVING FAMILY TRADITIONS?

March may not seem like the most natural time to talk about a November holiday, but as Christians we are called to be a thankful people. God blesses us daily. In the same way, we should take time every day to thank Him for those blessings. In this week's lesson, we see Paul's thanksgiving to God for the faith of the Corinthians, the reality of that faith, and the Sustainer of that faith.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Thankful for the Faith of Others

Verse 4: I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus

Paul begins his greeting with a customary thanksgiving: **I always thank my God for you**. His prayers to God include his gratitude for not only what God has done in his life, but also what He has done in the lives of others. We see that thanksgiving to God was a constant in Paul's prayer life. He is always thanking God for the church and for **the grace of God**. Thanksgiving was not an occasional duty that Paul carried out. Instead it was an integral part of his prayer life. This allowed him to focus on the good God was doing in the church. For us, thanksgiving leads us to focus on the good God is doing in our lives.

Thanksgiving must be an integral part of our daily walk with God because it helps us recognize how God is thoroughly working in our lives. When we stop and appreciate all that He's done, we begin to uncover more and more of His fingerprints in our lives. The more we recognize His works, the more amazed we become at His love and grace. Through this our natural reaction is worship. Thanksgiving leads to proper worship of God.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE THANKSGIVING A MORE VITAL PART OF YOUR PRAYER LIFE? HOW DOES THANKSGIVING ENHANCE OR EMPOWER OUR WORSHIP OF GOD?

Paul could have been tempted to skip the customary thanksgiving in his greeting considering how wayward the Corinthian church had become. However, he includes the thanksgiving in his letter. Paul exercises his words from Philippians 4:8:

"Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things."

The immediate reaction would be to move directly into the rebuke of the church, but Paul chooses to find the good in the situation first. Our initial instinct can be to find the negative about a person or situation and focus on the flaws we see. Paul, instead, highlights the positive work God is doing in the life of the church. In this case, the positive work is **the grace of God given to the members in Christ Jesus**. Every Christian, no matter their life circumstance, will always have the grace of God to reflect on when thanking the Father. They also can thank God for the grace He has given to others. Every other blessing in life pales in comparison to God's grace gained through Jesus Christ.

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF FOCUSING ON THE NEGATIVE IN MOST SITUATIONS? WHY DO YOU THINK WE SEEM TO MORE INTERESTED IN CRITICIZING INSTEAD OF ENCOURAGING?

Paul also may have understood the need to encourage his audience before speaking of their flaws. He knew he would need to admonish and exhort the church for its many issues, which may not have been well received. But encouraging the church first before reprimanding them lets the church know that Paul speaks out of love and not anger. Paul gives a great example of how to give thanks for someone when you have difficulty finding things worth being thankful for. In these verses, he gives thanks for the grace which God has given to the Corinthian church. In every situation, there is always something we can thank God for. Paul demonstrates that fact in this difficult situation.

WHY WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE SOMEONE BEFORE APPROACHING THEM ABOUT THEIR SIN? HOW WOULD IT MAKE THE PERSON MORE RECEPTIVE TO WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY?

Verse 5: That you were enriched in Him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge.

Paul is grateful that God has **enriched** the Corinthian church in Christ **in every way**. To be enriched is to be made rich, not to earn riches but to have riches given. From this we can understand two important points:

First, God is the enricher. There is nothing in ourselves to boast in; God is the source of our riches in every way. When we think of God as the enricher, it reminds us of our gratitude and motivates us to give thanks for His riches. This also keeps us from boasting in our own accomplishments. There is nothing in our lives that we have gained by our own power. As we are reminded in James 1:17:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Therefore the only one deserving of our praise and thanksgiving is God, the Enricher.

Second, we learn that God doesn't hold back. We are not blessed with moderate gifts. We are not impoverished by God. We are made rich, wealthy. God is generous in our lives. The grace of God enriches our lives in every way. God's grace isn't something that is sprinkled on a few parts of our lives but permeates every aspect of our being. Therefore, the more of our life we hand over to God, the more He is able to enrich it.

The Corinthians were enriched **in all speech and all knowledge**. The Greeks greatly valued speaking ability and knowledge as it was a judgment upon a person's intelligence and wisdom. Paul points to the rich speech and knowledge of the Corinthians as a result of God's blessing in their lives. It was not their natural abilities

that gained them great speech and knowledge, but rather the blessings of God through Christ Jesus. Again, this keeps the church from being able to boast in its own abilities in speech and knowledge. Instead, they are to recognize that those gifts are given by God.

HOW HAS GOD ENRICHED YOUR LIFE? HOW HAS HE ENRICHED SECOND BAPTIST?

The Reality of Faith

Verse 6: In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed in you

The church's enrichment in Christ in all knowledge and speech confirmed **the testimony about Christ** in the church. Their growth in these areas showed that Christ was in fact impacting their daily lives in some way. Though there may have been many issues with the church, the blessings of God evidenced in their lives showed they were faithful to the Lord. Many areas of their lives needed reproof, but their salvation was not in doubt.

There was evidence that this church was doing some things right. In our lives, we have issues that God wants us to work on. There is sin in our lives that need to be confessed and repented of. Our daily walk with the Lord may not be as strong as it once was or as it could be. As Christians, our daily lives show us how far we are from Christlikeness and the distance we need to go in order to grow closer to the image of God within us. While that is a part of our faith, our shortcomings are not what define us. Our position in Christ before the Lord is where our true identities lie. It is good for us to identify areas where we need to grow, but it is equally as important to see areas where we show Christ the most.

WHAT EVIDENCE IN YOUR LIFE POINTS TO YOUR SALVATION?

Verse 7: So that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Corinthians did **not lack any spiritual gift**. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lists the many spiritual gifts that God had given to the church and the Corinthians certainly were not lacking in those gifts. Each gift was given with a purpose to be fulfilled in the individual's life. In the same way, God has given our church no lack of spiritual gifts. Each of us has been enriched by a talent or passion from God that we are called to utilize for His glory.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TALENTS OR PASSIONS GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU AND YOUR CLASS? IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU USE THOSE GIFTS TO FURTHER THE WORK OF THE LORD'S CHURCH HERE AT SECOND BAPTIST?

The word translated **eagerly wait** means to await or expect eagerly. **The revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ** points to the future return of our Lord. The Corinthians were to live in a state of expectation. Jesus Christ is coming back and we are to live in light of that reality. This points us to the fact that our time on earth, and thus our time to influence others for the kingdom, is not infinite. In fact, our time is very short. But that is not meant to depress us in any way. In fact, it motivates us to make the most of the time we have and the most of the spiritual gifts that God has blessed each of us with.

HOW DOES KNOWING THAT CHRIST COULD RETURN AT ANY MOMENT MOTIVATE YOU IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE?

The Sustainer of Faith

Verse 8: He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The promise of verse 8 holds that Christ **will also strengthen** the church. This church, with all of its issues, is continually strengthened by the Lord. Christ does not do a single work in our life at conversion and then leave us to fend for ourselves. Instead there is constant access to His strength both during times of comfort and times of trial. There is opportunity in both for us as Christians to become stronger in our faith through our relationship with Christ.

Both phrases **to the end** and **in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ** point to Christ's second coming. There is a day coming where Jesus will return to this earth. He speaks of this moment in Matthew 24:30-31:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

His second coming will be both a time of mourning and a time of rejoicing. For the lost, it is a time for mourning. Jesus, whom they rejected, will appear and prove that He is the Son of God. They will realize their mistake in rejecting His salvation. To this end, we should be motivated by our desire that no one within our circle of influence stands on that day mourning. Whether a family member, a friend, a coworker, or a neighbor, we all have at least one person in our life that, if Jesus came back at this very moment, they would be mourning. It is our calling to at least give them an opportunity to choose rejoicing over mourning.

TAKE A FEW MOMENTS IN PRAYER ASKING GOD TO REVEAL TO YOU AND TO YOUR CLASS MEMBERS THOSE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIVES THAT DON'T KNOW CHRIST. CLOSE THE PRAYER BY ASKING GOD FOR THE COURAGE AND COMPASSION TO SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH THEM THIS WEEK.

For the people of God, this second coming will mark a great moment of rejoicing. At that moment, we **will be blameless** before God. The word used for blameless in this verse implies not just the acquittal of our sins, but the complete absence of a charge or accusation of sin to be acquitted of. We are not even accused of sin! We are seen in that moment not as sinners who have been saved but as saints, as His children. The Lord promises this in John 1:12-13:

But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

This is the reminder that we need daily, that God views us as His blameless children. Pastor Justin is finishing up a Sunday evening series on Breaking Free. In that study he has taught us the importance of realizing that we are saints in the eyes of God. We may have sin in our lives that we struggle with, but we are not defined by those sins, we are not bound by those sins. God has already given each of us victory and we can live victorious lives over sin when we are reminded of that.

HOW DOES THE REALITY OF OUR VICTORY OVER SIN HELP US IN OUR DAILY STRUGGLES WITH SIN?

Verse 9: God is faithful; you were called by Him into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

God is faithful. Just think of those three words and how beautiful they are. God is always faithful in His dealings with man. Every promise He makes will be fulfilled. Contrast that to everything else in this life: friends are not always faithful, jobs are not guaranteed, family doesn't live forever. Everything in this world is temporary and most of the time people will let you down. But not God! Even as we may struggle to be faithful to Him, He is always faithful to us.

WHAT DO THE WORDS GOD IS FAITHFUL MEAN TO YOU?

We were shown His faithfulness when we **were called by Him into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord**. It is through God's character and our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ that God enriches our lives. Though we were separated from Him by our sin, He provided a way for us to once again enjoy His fellowship. This didn't come through our searching for God, but rather from God's calling on us. God pursued us, God provided for our salvation, and God restored our relationship with Himself. What more is there to be thankful for? We are certainly called to be a thankful people!

Final Thoughts

Even in an extremely difficult situation, Paul was able to give thanks to God for His work in the Corinthian church. In the same way, no matter how difficult our life situation may be, we can always reflect on God's grace, generosity, strength, and faithfulness. God had every reason to withhold His blessings on our lives because of our rebellion, yet He still called us into fellowship with His Son. Two things to take away from this week:

First, we have no excuse for being ungrateful. God has done an amazing work in the life of the christian and the life of the church. Take time to recognize His works in your life and share your gratitude to Him through thanksgiving this week.

Second, even the most wayward of friends should receive our grace. Paul was gracious with the Corinthians. Yes, he would go on to admonish them for their misdeeds, but he first recognized the good God was doing in their lives. In your interactions with friends and fellow christians this week, seek to find the good God is doing in their lives, and share with them how you see God working through them.

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

DIVIDED: THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

March 11, 2018

When building your own home, there are thousands of decisions that must be made. Where will it be built? How much do you plan to spend? What color should the guest room be painted? What kind of light fixtures should be in the living room? What carpet pile height do you prefer? It can become overwhelming having to decide on so many options.

ASK IF ANYONE HAS EXPERIENCE BUILDING THEIR OWN HOME. DISCUSS SOME OF THE DECISIONS THAT HAD TO BE MADE DURING THE PROCESS.

There are three important factors that go into building a solid house: the foundation, the building design, and the identity of the builder. In this week's lesson, we explore how to build a strong house of faith in our lives on a solid foundation (The Barebones of the Gospel) with a good building design (The Meat of Wisdom) built by a strong Builder (The Teacher of Wisdom).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The Barebones of the Gospel

2:1-2: *When I came to you, brothers and sisters, announcing the mystery of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

Paul came in effort to **announce the mystery of God**, or testimony of God, to the people of Corinth. The word mystery in the New Testament refers to parts of the gospel that were once hidden but are now revealed. The mystery of God was not mysterious in modern sense, as in unknown, but had now been made known to man through Jesus Christ. In Paul's words this mystery is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He does not proclaim the mystery of God **with brilliance of speech or wisdom**. The greek teachers of Paul's day were judged by their eloquence and speaking ability. Wisdom of the day was judged by the presentation. Paul takes the opposite view, instead focusing on the strength of the content of his message rather than the brilliance of his speech. In doing so, Paul proves faithful to the fact that the gospel needs no help.

Instead of brilliant speech, Paul relies on the barebones of the gospel and **decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**. As any reader of Romans could tell you, Paul could have impressed the Corinthians with deep spiritual truths. However, in this circumstance nothing was of more importance than the basics of the gospel. The gospel needed no help then and it needs no help today. It doesn't need amazing teachers for the message to be powerful. It doesn't need long winded explanations to convince the audience. Adding to the gospel only waters it down and dilutes the message. Knowing this, we must recognize that when we rely on something more than the gospel, we are missing it's true power. The simple testimony of God is powerful enough on its own.

WHAT IS SO POWERFUL ABOUT ABOUT PAUL'S MESSAGE OF CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED? WHY DOESN'T IT NEED ANY ADDITIONS?

2:3-4: *I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power*

Paul did not cut a powerfully striking appearance before the Corinthians. In fact, he presented himself **in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling**. He illustrates this in 2 Corinthians 10:10:

For it is said, "His letters are mighty and powerful, but his physical presence is weak and his public speaking amounts to nothing."

He would not have been confused with Billy Graham by any means, but he did not need to be a physically impressive man since his power came from the Spirit. The Spirit provided the true strength that was needed to carry the message of Christ.

Paul's preaching did not include **persuasive words of wisdom** to try to woo his audience into accepting the message. What it did come with is the power of the Spirit. It was the **demonstration of the Spirit's power** that gave Paul's words their great impact. As we saw in last week's lesson on 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, the demonstration of the Spirit's power came in the enrichment of the Corinthians in speech, knowledge, spiritual gifts, and strength. In a word: Change. The Spirit demonstrates His power through changed lives. The life of a Christian, one that has been radically changed by God, is a far greater argument for the gospel than the strongest and most eloquent sermon.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THE SPIRIT HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS POWER IN YOUR LIFE? WHAT STORIES DO YOU KNOW OF RADICAL CHANGE AFTER SALVATION?

2:5: *So that your faith might not be based on human wisdom but on God's power.*

Human wisdom changes with the ebb and flow of culture, but God's power remains constant and mighty throughout the ages. Faith built on human understanding is as stable as the house built on the sand from Matthew 7:26-27.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.

That faith will not remain standing in the struggles of life and will collapse with a great crash. But the faith built on God's power, built on the barebones of the gospel, will stand until the end. It is the foundation of the gospel that gives our faith true strength. When we rely on anything or anyone else, our faith is shaky and will not stand the storms of life.

As Christians, the basics of the gospel is all that we need when sharing our faith. We must take care not to add to the gospel lest it becomes watered down. And we must rely on nothing more than the gospel when sharing. The gospel has the backing of God's power and there is nothing more than we need when sharing our faith.

The Meat of Wisdom

2:6-7: *We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory.*

While the gospel is powerful enough on its own, Paul did **speak a wisdom among the mature**. When building a home, you wouldn't stop just with the foundation. You would continue building according to your building design. Walls, doors, flooring, plumbing, electrical, etc. all begin to take shape as the home is built. The framing doesn't magically appear, it slowly builds out as the process continues. So too does our faith. With the strong foundation set, we can begin to build out our faith confidently on God's wisdom. As we grow in our knowledge and experience in God's wisdom, and as we mature in our faith, we can understand more fully God's work in our lives around us and our role in that work.

Paul doesn't extend this wisdom to the spiritually immature; He speaks this wisdom to the mature. Why? The **wisdom of this age, or the rulers of this age, are coming to nothing**. The wisdom of this age is foolish because it is based solely on the temporary. It views the world as it only can: through the lens of the present and of the self. They are guided by self and not by the Spirit. To the rulers of this age, God's wisdom remains hidden, remains a mystery. They cannot think beyond themselves and this time.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF LIVING FOR THE PRESENT? WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT WE FOCUS ON THE TEMPORARY INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ON THE ETERNAL?

2:8: *None of the rulers of this age knew this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

The rulers of the day, the religious leaders, operated out of the wisdom of the day and not the spiritual wisdom that the Spirit provides. Had the rulers been versed in God's wisdom, they would have recognized Jesus as the Son of God and would not have sentenced Him to crucifixion. While they appeared to be righteous and to know the Word of God, they were unable to recognize God Himself standing before them. Jesus described them quite graphically in Matthew 23:27-28:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

They may have had knowledge of the Law, but they lacked Godly wisdom. In our lives we may have a mental faith but not a practical faith. We can read the Bible, listen intently to every sermon, and attend small group Bible studies, but if our actions do not reflect what we see in the Word of God, then we are operating out of worldly wisdom and not God's wisdom. James speaks of this in James 1:22-25:

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does.

The rulers were hearers of the word but certainly were not doers of the word. This is evidenced in their sentencing of Jesus to die on the cross. Their actions were a window into the intentions of their hearts. In the same way, our actions are the fruit of what we value in our hearts. If we value the word, then our actions reflect it. If we value the world, our actions will reflect it.

HOW DO OUR ACTIONS REVEAL OUR HEARTS?

IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE REVEAL THE SPIRIT THROUGH OUR ACTIONS?

2:9-11: *But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived—God has prepared these things for those who love Him." God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit in him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

In verse 9 Paul provides a loose reference, but not a direct quotation, of Isaiah 64:4 to convey the idea of the hidden nature of God's wisdom. God had chosen to keep this testimony hidden until the time in which man could finally comprehend it. This could not be accomplished until Jesus' atoning work on the cross. Only then could man, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, understand the thoughts of God.

The Spirit is a trustworthy teacher because **the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God**. The Spirit is well versed in the Lord because of His identity within the Holy Trinity. Just as a man's spirit knows his every thought because it is a part of man, so too does the Spirit of God know **the thoughts of God**. What an incredible blessing to have access to the thoughts of God through His Spirit!

The Teacher of Wisdom

2:12: *Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God.*

Our minds are naturally focused on worldly wisdom. Without the assistance of the Spirit, we would never have the ability to comprehend what God has done in our world. Knowing this, we were graciously given **the Spirit who comes from God** to be our teacher, to guide us in His wisdom. Our reliance is fully and completely on Him for understanding.

Just imagine the excitement and newness of understanding Paul had studying the Scriptures after he received the Spirit as a teacher. What he thought he knew so completely took on a totally new meaning as the Spirit revealed God's wisdom. Today we have the benefit of having the Spirit teach us through Scripture. We have access to God's mind as we study His Word.

ASK GROUP MEMBERS FOR EXAMPLES OF WHEN THE SPIRIT HAS SHOWN THEM SOMETHING IN THE WORD THAT THEY HADN'T SEEN OR UNDERSTOOD BEFORE.

2:13: *We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.*

Paul reiterates that his preaching is of the Word and not of the world. Since he has received the Godly wisdom that can only be revealed by the Spirit, he turns and teaches others what the Spirit is teaching him. Paul does

not cling to the teaching himself, he understands his role as a spiritual leader to share this wisdom with others. God reveals His wisdom to us not for us to hoard but for us to pass on. This wisdom affects our actions but it also implores us to explain **spiritual things to spiritual people**. While not everyone is in the office of pastor as Paul was, each one of us still has people within our sphere of influence that we can pass God's knowledge to. We each have people that we can entrust with God's revealed wisdom; be it a spouse, children, grandchildren, relatives, friends, neighbors, or coworkers

TAKE A MOMENT HERE TO LEAD YOUR CLASS IN PRAYER. PRAY FOR GOD TO REVEAL TO YOU SOMEONE HE WANTS YOU TO INVEST IN. WHETHER IT'S SHARING THE GOSPEL OR TEACHING WHAT GOD HAS TAUGHT YOU, EACH ONE OF US SHOULD BE INVESTING IN OTHER PERSON.

2:14-16: *But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. For, who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

While the spiritual person can receive what the Spirit teaches, the spiritless person views spiritual things as foolishness. He rejects what he hears because it makes no earthly sense to him. We the Christians, the spiritual by extension, are viewed as foolish. This is where we rest on the wisdom of God. Though we may encounter conflict, ridicule, or persecution for our beliefs, we can rest confidently in the knowledge that what we believe is eternal. With our spiritual eyes we can see more clearly as we walk through life.

Our spiritual understanding of God's mind allows us to **evaluate everything**. Since **we have the mind of Christ**, we can then view every life situation through His eyes. Stormy circumstances that would frighten the unspiritual take on a completely different view in our lives. We see trials of life as opportunities to rely on God and to remember that only His strength can carry us through every aspect of life.

Final Thoughts

What a wonderful gift God has given us in the Holy Spirit. Through His moving we encounter Christ in the gospel. Through His teaching we are able to understand the very thoughts of God. And through His guidance we can evaluate our lives in light of the eternal. The power that was once reserved for certain individuals for certain periods of time now resides within us thanks to Christ and Him crucified.

DRAW CLASS TO A CLOSE IN A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT. ASK THAT HE REVEALS HIMSELF DAILY IN YOUR LIFE AND THE LIVES OF YOUR CLASS MEMBERS. ASK HIM TO FILL YOU WITH HIS THOUGHTS AND DISCERNMENT AS YOU PREPARE FOR WORSHIP.

1 Corinthians 3:18-4:7

GROW: IN HUMILITY

March 18, 2018

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:18-19, "*Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly of spirit with the humble than to divide plunder with the proud.*" God values humility. Jesus emphasizes the point in Matthew 5:5, "*Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.*"

WHY ARE THE HUMBLE BLESSED IN THE EYES OF GOD?

This week we explore our calling to grow in humility by seeing how humility is gained, how humility is displayed, and finally how humility is rewarded.

Explore the Text

Humility Gained

3:18- Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool so that he can become wise.

Paul encourages his readers to not **deceive** themselves. The deception comes when one believes himself **wise in this age**. He explains the foolishness of worldly wisdom in the following verses, so to think wisdom can be gained from the world is a lie. The world does not produce true wisdom.

A good illustration of this is Hans Christian Anderson's short story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. In the story, a vain emperor is deceived by two con men who convince him that they can make clothes out of a special material. They say the material is only visible to the wisest of men and would appear invisible to those who are not worthy of their post or who are unusually stupid. As the emperor visits the shop of the con men, they pretend to show him the clothes and, naturally, the emperor cannot see anything. Yet, because he did not want to admit to being unworthy of his post or unusually stupid, he pretended to see the clothes. They then convince him to remove his clothes, put on the invisible clothes, and lead a procession through the village. He parades through the village, naked as the day he was born. To be wise in this age is to clothe ourselves in wisdom as phony as the emperor's invisible clothes.

God's wisdom is not of the present age, or of any age for that matter. God is of an ageless wisdom. His wisdom doesn't fade like modern day culture. While we can look back a century into the past and see how ignorant our ancestors were in many facets, so too will those centuries from now look upon us and our ignorance. This is not so with God. His wisdom stands the test of time and never fades into the pages of the history books.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF THE WORLD'S WISDOM THAT IS FOOLISHNESS TO GOD?

To combat self-deception, Paul encourages his readers to **become a fool**. He is not implying that we should abandon intellect, but rather become versed in God's wisdom, which is foolishness to man. In the eyes of the world around us, we look foolish for following the commands of God. So the more we follow His teaching, the

more foolish we become in the eyes of the world. Only through this foolishness do we become truly wise. It takes great humility to willingly be viewed as foolish in order to pursue true wisdom. Humility is gained through this voluntary submittal to God's wisdom at the cost of being viewed as a fool in the world's eye.

3:19-20- For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, since it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness;" and again, "The Lord knows that the reasonings of the wise are futile."

Humility begins with the recognition that God's wisdom is far greater than our own wisdom. This comes from realizing that our worldly wisdom **is foolishness with God**. The word translated foolishness here can mean dull, sluggish, or stupid. This reflects the heart and character of the fool. Therefore, our worldly wisdom is mere stupidity to God. Our wisdom is so short sighted and so ill informed that it is foolishness in the eyes of the Lord. James warns of the arrogance of man in James 4:13-15:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Humility Displayed

3:21-23- So let no one boast in human leaders, for everything is yours—whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come—everything is yours, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Earlier in Chapter 3, Paul spoke out against divisions of the church centered on loyalty to individual leaders of the church. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, while all great leaders of the church, were still but servants to Christ and His bride, the Church. He emphasizes this point by saying that the leaders belonged to the saints. Everything, be it **Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come** all belong to the church. Human leaders are meant to serve us. Therefore, to boast in them is foolishness, for they are simply given to serve.

Paul displays great humility in not seeking the glory of man. He realizes that he belongs **to Christ, and Christ belongs to God**. Therefore the only loyalty he is concerned with is his own loyalty to Christ, to Whom he belongs.

4:1-2- A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful.

The leaders of the church should be thought of **as servants of Christ**. As a servant of Christ, Paul is under the command of Christ. Whatever Christ calls him to do, Paul must be faithful to do it. This requires Paul or any leader of the church to know the wishes of the Master. This comes through a daily, close walk with the Lord. Once those wishes are made known, then the leader must serve the Lord as he is commanded. Great pastors are great servants.

Jesus, when speaking about the religious leaders in Matthew 23:11-12, said:

The greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus is speaking of the leadership qualities He looks for in the leaders of His church. The two qualities? Servanthood and humility. Paul understood that in God's church, humility was a sign of understanding one's true place before the Lord. Only then can they lead others to understand their own place before God.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF TIMES YOU HAVE SEEN HUMILITY DISPLAYED IN LEADERSHIP?

Leaders are also **managers of the mysteries of God**. As we saw in last week's lesson, the mysteries of God are the aspects of the gospel that were once unknown to man but have been brought to light through Jesus Christ. The leader's role is to teach these mysteries to his church. He must know and understand them, then he must make them known and understandable. The worldly view of success can easily be accomplished through the teaching of worldly wisdom. Paul warned Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3 of a coming day when many in the church would turn to worldly teaching:

For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear.

Leaders must be effective in teaching the commands of God. This is not just for leaders, but it is for every christian. As we learn more about the Word of God, we have the same responsibility to share it with others. While most of us are not pastors, God has placed people in our lives that we can share His word with.

TAKE A MOMENT TO ASK CLASS MEMBERS TO SHARE ONE THING GOD HAS TAUGHT THEM IN THE PAST WEEK.

Paul's desire is to **be found faithful** in his task of servant and manager. Paul grades his job performance through his faithfulness as a servant to Christ and preacher of the Word. He doesn't view success through the modern lens of success in church: numbers and dollars. Instead he judges himself solely on his faithfulness in service to Christ and teaching of the Word. In December, we had the opportunity to video chat as a congregation with Randi Lynn McBride, a member of Second Baptist, who is serving as a missionary in Uganda. Pastor Justin asked her what outcome she hoped for through her missionary experience. Her reply: she hoped to be found faithful! That should be our daily prayer as well.

Paul's view of leadership as servant and manager comes only from those who can display humility. The natural draw of leadership is the praise and glory from those that are led. When a leader can guide a group through his own strength, he can be greatly praised. This is not the way of the church. Servant leadership in the church results in praise and glory to the Lord. A church leader shouldn't be judged on his ability but rather on his faithfulness to Christ. Any leader who seeks the glory for himself rather than for the Lord is unworthy of service in God's kingdom. It takes a humble spirit to serve the bride of Christ.

Humility Rewarded

4:3-4- It is of little importance to me that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I don't even judge myself. For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. It is the Lord who judges me.

Paul is not concerned with being **judged by** the Corinthians **or by any human court**. He knows where his true judgment comes from. It is not the church, human courts, or even himself that can adequately judge him.

As he established in the previous verses, man's wisdom is foolishness to God. Therefore, man's judgment based on that foolishness should be of little importance to the Christian.

WHY IS HUMAN JUDGMENT UNRELIABLE COMPARED TO GOD'S JUDGMENT?

Paul admits that **I don't even judge myself**. How could this be? We must remember that this is the same Paul that wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:8 that the Christian will stand "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul knew that **it is the Lord who judges** him. As we have seen, human judgment, based on the worldly wisdom, is not sufficient to judge spiritual things. Paul knew that even within himself, he cannot adequately judge himself because of his human weakness. Only God can truly judge a person. And only God's judgment matters when it comes to justification. So Paul, even when looking to himself, displays the humility to know that only God is worthy to judge the righteous and the wicked.

WHAT COMFORT DO YOU FIND IN KNOWING THAT IT'S ONLY GOD'S JUDGMENT THAT TRULY MATTERS?

4:5- So don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts. And then praise will come to each one from God.

Paul warns us to not **judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes**. There will be a time when Jesus returns and will **bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intention of the hearts**. Any judgment made before that day is literally made in the dark. When we judge now we judge with only a small part of the whole facts. That's the danger of judging others. It's like trying to walk through an unfamiliar house in the dark. Because you cannot see everything, you'll end up hurting yourself and/or breaking something you come across. Our judgment of others is impaired because of this darkness. The darkness blinds us in two areas.

First, we cannot judge others because we do not know the full story of their lives. Each one of us have experiences in our past that shape how we behave. A quiet person may be judged as unfriendly, when in reality they have a history with abuse, causing them to be cautious opening up to others. An outgoing person may be judged as confident when in reality they are deeply insecure because of a history of neglect. Someone viewed as a good person can have a deep hidden sin and someone viewed as a bad person can be the one that is generous to the poor. The outward appearance and behavior of a person is never the full picture of that person. We have an incomplete basis to judge until Christ comes with His light

Second, we cannot judge others since we cannot see the intentions of their hearts. Sometimes good intentions lead to bad results, and sometimes bad intentions lead to good results. All we are able to judge is the results themselves. However, God is concerned with the heart.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WHEN YOU HAVE JUDGED SOMEONE NEGATIVELY ONLY TO DISCOVER YOU WERE COMPLETELY WRONG ABOUT THEM?

Until Christ comes, any judgment on our part is premature. While our flesh may be quick to judge others, there is great freedom and peace in knowing that judgment is not our responsibility. What a great burden God lifts from us by not putting us in the judgment seat of others.

4:6-7- Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying: “Nothing beyond what is written.” The purpose is that none of you will be arrogant, favoring one person over another. For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn’t receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn’t received it?

The teaching Paul presents is not meant to be rhetorical, it’s meant to be practical. In fact, he lets the Corinthians know that he has **applied these things to himself and Apollo for the Corinthians’ benefit**. Paul applies his teaching to leadership in the church to show that even church leadership is not above the teachings of the Scripture. He, Apollos, Cephas, and any other person in leadership is in no position to judge just as those who follow them are in no position to judge.

The purpose of applying these principles to himself and Apollos is so that none of the Corinthians **will be arrogant, favoring one person over another**. Since no one can be accurately judged until the coming of the Lord, we all remain on the same level as one another before the cross. To favor any one person over another is simply arrogance on our part. James warns against favoritism in James 2:1-4:

My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Sit here in a good place,” and yet you say to the poor person, “Stand over there,” or “Sit here on the floor by my footstool,” haven’t you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

The rich person shouldn’t boast in his riches but rather listen to Paul when he says **Who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn’t receive?** All good things come from the Lord. To think oneself to be superior is to be ignorant to the fact that it is God who gives, not us who earn. The humble person recognizes that not even their next breath is guaranteed but is rather a gift from the Lord.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BLESSINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT WE TEND TO CREDIT OURSELVES FOR RATHER THAN GIVE CREDIT TO GOD FOR?

Final Thoughts

As we draw to a close, the question becomes: How do you put humility into practice?

First, through prayer and Bible study, ask God to give you a right view of yourself in light of Him. The better we understand the greatness of God and the smallness of ourselves, the easier it is to realize humility is the best response.

Second, think of someone else this week. Ask God to show you someone this week that you can focus on blessing. With each interaction, let your decisions and actions around them be for their benefit and not your own. Take this week to put the needs of another first before your own needs.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER WAYS YOU CAN EITHER GAIN OR DEMONSTRATE HUMILITY THIS WEEK?

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

JUDGMENT: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

March 25, 2018

There's a story about a young child who looked out his bedroom window and saw a flock of white sheep on the hillside. The contrast of the white sheep against the green hill caused him to think, "Wow, what clean, white sheep!" That night as he slept, a winter storm moved in and blanketed the countryside in snow. When the child woke up and looked outside he saw the same flock of sheep on the snow covered hillside. As they walked in the pure, white snow, the boy noticed just how dingy and dirty they really were. The sheep hadn't changed. The only thing that changed was the standard by which the boy judged the cleanliness of the sheep.

HOW DOES OUR BASIS OF JUDGMENT AFFECT OUR ACCURACY OF JUDGMENT?

In our life we have two standards by which we can judge: the standards of the world and the standards of God. In this week's lesson, we learn how the Corinthian church had chosen the wrong standard and how Paul called them to change.

Explore the Text

Find the Right View of Sin

5:1: *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles—a man is sleeping with his father's wife.*

Paul begins this section approaching the church about its wayward view of sin. He is appalled that **it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you**. Paul, writing from Ephesus, had heard of this man **sleeping with his father's wife**. The man is clearly in violation of Leviticus 18:8:

You are not to have sex with your father's wife; she is your father's family.

This man's sin was no moral grey area. He was clearly in violation of God's commands. Yet the Corinthian church had done nothing to discipline the man and work towards reconciliation between him, God, and the church. Instead, reports of the man's sin and the church's inaction had become widespread. With today's technology it's not hard to imagine news of this magnitude crossing hundreds of miles and spanning two continents, but in Paul's day it is amazing that he was hearing reports of this issue at Corinth. For it to be such an open secret shows that the church had become tolerant of this sin.

What amazes Paul about this report of sexual immorality is that it is **the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles**. Not even the pagan Gentiles that surrounded the church would tolerate a man sleeping with his father's wife. The church, the Bride of Christ, had lost its right view of sin to the point where pagans were closer to Christlikeness than the saints in the church! The church needed to be reminded of the depth and danger of sin against God.

HOW CAN A CHURCH'S REPUTATION IN THE COMMUNITY HELP OR HINDER IT'S MINISTRY?

Our world tries to normalize sin through popular culture. The more we are exposed to sin that the world views as acceptable, the more we begin to rationalize our participation in that sin. Just like the Corinthian church, we could very well lose sight of the severity of sin against God.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SIN THAT IS BEING TOLERATED AND NORMALIZED IN OUR CULTURE? WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SIN THAT IS BEING TOLERATED AND NORMALIZED IN THE CHURCH?

5:2- *And you are arrogant! Shouldn't you be filled with grief and remove from your congregation the one who did this?*

For their toleration of the man's sin, Paul viewed the Corinthians as **arrogant**. The word used here means to puff up, blow up, or inflate. The mental picture is of a child who puffs up her chest when she has accomplished something she is proud of. Not only did they believe that their tolerance was good, they were proud of their inaction against the sinner!

Our culture today is puffed up and proud of its toleration of sin. It's no coincidence that most major cities host yearly Gay Pride events that celebrate tolerance of homosexuality. The world doesn't view sin against God as something to be ashamed of but rather as a source of pride. In this sense, the Corinthian church reflected the culture rather than the Father.

IN WHAT WAYS DOES THE CHURCH REFLECT THE CULTURE TODAY?

As opposed to arrogance, Paul calls the Corinthians to **be filled with grief**. The church should mourn over the decision to celebrate their tolerance with the sinning man. As discussed in verse 1, the man's sin wouldn't even be tolerated among the Gentiles. Corinthian civil law allowed for the exile of a man caught in adultery and incest. Even in the community such a sin would not be tolerated. The church had condoned a sin that even the worst of sinners would have condemned. The right response to such sin should have been grief. The church should have grieved what the man and woman were doing and it should have grieved over the reputation this sin had given the church.

Proper grief over sin should have led the church to take the action of **removing from their congregation the one who did this**. Grief should have led the man to repent of his sin and the church to repent of their toleration of this sin. Having the right view of sin leads us to acknowledge our offense against God but acknowledgement is not enough; we must take action to rid ourselves of our sin. In the same way, if we have a brother or sister in Christ who openly sins before God and the church, Paul clearly teaches they should be removed from the fellowship until they have acknowledged and repented of their sin.

WHY MUST REPENTANCE BE FOLLOWED BY ACTION?

WHY MUST AN UNREPENTANT SINNER BE REMOVED FROM THE CHURCH?

Remove the Sinner

5:3-4- *Even though I am absent in the body, I am present in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who has been doing such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus*

While Paul may be **absent in the body**, he reminds the church that he is **present in spirit**. Though Paul was physically separate from the church, he knew he was with them in spirit. This is a great reminder for all of us that as Christians we are all connected by one Spirit. Though our bodies may be away from our fellow church members, we are always present with each other in spirit. In this way we can rejoice in the work of missionaries across the globe who are furthering God's kingdom in the most remote locations. We can pray in strength for brothers and sisters in Christ in nations closed to the gospel who gather under the threat of persecution. From hundreds of miles away we can mourn the loss of a great saint like Billy Graham as he finishes his race well here on earth and reaps his heavenly rewards. Though we are apart, we are a part of one body.

WHAT COMFORT DO YOU TAKE IN KNOWING THAT EVEN WHEN YOU ARE PHYSICALLY ABSENT FROM THE CHURCH, YOU ARE STILL PRESENT IN SPIRIT?

HOW DOES THIS FACT CHANGE THE WAY YOU PRAY FOR OTHERS AROUND THE WORLD?

Paul's letter would serve as his **pronounced judgment on the one who has been doing such a thing**. This would leave no doubt in the church's mind how he feels about the situation when the church is **assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus**. The decision to remove the sinner was not Paul's decision to make alone. The church must gather to make the decision. He made his view known and the church had to decide to take action.

It was more than just Paul's view; his words brought **the power of our Lord Jesus**. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul was writing the very Word of God to the Corinthians. In light of God's Word, they must take godly action. When we gather as a church to make decisions, especially decisions as important as removing a brother in Christ from fellowship, we must look to God's Word for guidance. We must follow His Word even if it comes into conflict with our own opinion.

ARE THERE TIMES WHERE GOD'S WORD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO SOMETHING AND YOU WERE HESITANT TO OBEY?

5:5- *Hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

Paul calls on the church **to hand the one over to Satan**. By this, Paul is calling on the church to remove the man from their fellowship. Make no mistake, he does not call on the church to do this lightly. In all of the shortcomings of the Corinthian church and in all of the other issues that he addresses in his letter, this is the only instance where he calls for the removal of a specific person. The man's allegiance was divided between God and Satan. Since he was openly and unrepentantly participating in this sin Paul calls on the church to release him to Satan. The man may not have been consciously serving Satan, but by his actions he was practically serving Satan. Jesus warns in Matthew 6:24 that we cannot straddle the fence between serving God or serving Satan; we either serve one or the other:

No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

WHY IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SERVE GOD AND STILL LIVE LIKE A SINNER?

The purpose of removing the sinner and handing him over to Satan was **for the destruction of the flesh**. In reference to the destruction of the flesh, Paul could be meaning one or both of the following outcomes: either death of the physical flesh or death of the fleshly nature that led him to openly sin. The hope, certainly, was that the man would be reconciled to God and restored to the fellowship of the church. The purpose of discipline is not to punish a person but to help them grow stronger in their faith. We discipline children because we want them to be safe but also because we want them to have better lives. God knows that the path the man was walking down was one that led only to destruction. Stepping in to discipline him is far more loving than tolerating his sin and allowing him to continue in it. The purpose of confronting Christian brothers or sisters about sin is not to cast judgment but to keep them from going down a path that leads to pain.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE CAN LOVINGLY APPROACH A BROTHER OR SISTER IN CHRIST ABOUT THEIR SIN?

The hope of removing the sinner from the congregation is **that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord**. The desire would have been for the man to return to the fellowship of the church. However, confrontation doesn't always bring about the desired result. If the man didn't return to the fellowship in the church, the hope was that at least his spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord.

The Danger of Sin in the Church

5:6- *Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough?*

Why was it so important that the sinner in the church be removed? Doesn't everyone in the church struggle with sin? The difference with this man was his openness in his sin and the church's boasting in the toleration of that sin. If he were to remain in the fellowship, others could have been emboldened to proudly pursue their sins. Paul uses the analogy **that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough**. It takes only the smallest amount of sin toleration to begin to change the whole church.

5:7-8- Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

How can the church carry out the act of cleaning **out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch**? It is important here to understand the practice of using leaven. When making bread today yeast is added to dough in order to make the bread rise. In Paul's time, leaven was a piece of dough from a previous batch of dough that is then added to the new batch. Each new batch of dough contained remnants of the old dough. While this is effective in making the bread rise it also had the potential to retain impurities from the previous batch and contaminate the new batch. Leaven is retained from the new contaminated batch which then contaminates the next batch and so on. The way to break the cycle of contaminated dough was to start with a new unleavened batch such as at the time of Passover. In the church and in our lives the only way to have a fresh start is to completely abandon our sin.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN SIN BECOME A NEVER-ENDING CYCLE IN YOUR LIFE?

WHAT IS THE DANGER OF ALLOWING THE SIN CYCLE CONTINUE IN YOUR LIFE?

Paul calls the church to abandon **the leaven of malice and evil** and replace it with **the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**. The word, translated here as malice, denotes a vicious character. The word for evil can also be translated as wickedness. Allowing the sinful man to remain would be to allow malice and wickedness to continue growing in the church. Only when that leaven is removed can sincerity and truth grow.

Final Thoughts

Removing someone from the church is a serious command, but it comes from a serious view of sin and its impact on the church. The pain of church discipline is nothing compared to the shame of church inaction. Speaking on the subject of adultery, Jesus warns in Matthew 5:29-30:

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell!

The health of the whole body is more important than any individual part. If there is a part that is harming the body, we must make the difficult decision to remove it. Whether it's a sin in your life that you're struggling with or a person in your life that is influencing you in an ungodly way, it's worth the pain of removing them from your life in order to grow in your faith in God. So this week, encourage your class to pray through the following:

First, ask God to show you any sin in your life that is hindering your relationship with Him. Repent of that sin and cry out to God for strength to resist it in the future.

Second, is there anyone in your life that is causing harm to your faith? Whether it's a friend, loved one, or significant other, ask God to show you if they are influencing you in the wrong way. Cry out to Him for the discernment of whether they need to be removed from your life and the strength to follow through on His commands.

Finally, is there a brother or sister in Christ that you know is in open sin? Cry out to God for the courage to lovingly approach them about that sin and the openness of their heart to hear your concern.

Complete Schedule

DATE	LIFE GROUPS	SERMON
March 4	1 Corinthians 1:4-9 Called: To Be Thankful	1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Divided: The Power of One
March 11	1 Corinthians 2:1-16 Divided: The Power of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 3:1-17 Grow: In Maturity
March 18	1 Corinthians 3:18-4:7 Grow: In Humility	1 Corinthians 4:8-21 Grow: In Submission
March 25	1 Corinthians 5:1-8 Judgment: Church Discipline	1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11 Judgment: Immorality & Lawsuits
April 1	NO SUNDAY SCHOOL	1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Judgment: Yourself
April 8	1 Corinthians 7:1-40 Marriage, Singleness, Divorce	1 Corinthians 8:1-9:18 Freedom: Brings Responsibility
April 15	1 Corinthians 9:19-27 Freedom: Brings Sacrifice	1 Corinthians 10:1-4 Freedom: Brings Reflection
April 22	1 Corinthians 10:15-11:1 Freedom: Brings Concern	1 Corinthians 11:2-19 The Body: Equality
April 29	1 Corinthians 11:20-34 The Body: Remembrance	1 Corinthians 12:1-11 The Body: Diversity
May 6	1 Corinthians 12:12-30 The Body: Unity	1 Corinthians 13:1-13 The Body: Love
May 13	1 Corinthians 14:1-25 The Body: Clarity	1 Corinthians 14:26-40 The Body: Edification
May 20	1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Resurrection: The Facts	1 Corinthians 15:12-34 Resurrection: The Hope
May 27	1 Corinthians 15:35-58 Resurrection: The Future	1 Corinthians 16:1-24 One God, One Gospel, One Glory