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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

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**WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED
1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:5**

INTRODUCTION

We have seen the Corinthians' struggle with division among their ranks. The church is at odds with its founder, Paul the Apostle, and it had experienced some degree of division among its own members. The central problem is that Paul no longer seems wise to the Corinthians; in fact, he appears weak and his message sounds foolish. To understand how such a situation could arise, we must understand the context. The Corinthians loved powerful, influential speakers who offered all varieties of philosophy. Some historians believe that there were as many as 50 popular philosophies espoused by numerous theorists. The Corinthians were accustomed to aligning themselves with one or more of these philosophers and then championing his particular philosophy. Often, a person would not be persuaded by a cohesive argument, but by a learned scholar who proclaimed his philosophy with cleverness and eloquence. So when Paul left Corinth, the church began to depart from his message and return to their habit of aligning themselves behind various leaders. Even worse, they began to think of the gospel as some new philosophy. In fact, they began to believe that they had arrived at some higher wisdom and consequently, they began to boast in their wisdom. Arguments against Paul and one another arose because the members of the church had misunderstood the gospel and become proud. Therefore, Paul corrects the Corinthians' understanding of what it means to be wise, or what it means to be spiritual. In essence, Paul must say to them that God's wisdom is not at all like the world's wisdom. In fact, the wisdom of God looks like foolishness to the unbelieving world. Paul offers 3 examples of how God's wisdom contradicts the world's wisdom.

1. GOD'S WISDOM IS REVEALED THROUGH A CRUCIFIED SAVIOR (1:18-25)

Perhaps the conflict between the Corinthians and Paul arose because Paul simply talked too often about a crucified Savior instead of offering witty remarks and practical advice for living "wisely". Rather than offering his own version of wisdom to compete with the 50 other philosophies in Corinth, Paul offers the cross as the only true wisdom from God. In fact, Paul claims that the cross absolutely divides the wise and the foolish (v18). He quotes Isaiah 29:14 (v19) revealing that God intended to crush all human wisdom through the message of a crucified Savior. The cross is powerful because its message alone can save while every other philosophy falls short of this ultimate goal (vv20-21). In fact, if a person is to be saved from sin, he must abandon all hopes of finding some saving wisdom within himself and simply become one who believes in the message of the cross. God rejoices in saving those who believe the message of the cross.

Rather than simply taking God at His word, the Jews demanded signs and the Greeks searched for wisdom (v22). In fact, the message of the cross became a great stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (v23). In other words, the Jews demanded that God prove Himself to them before they would believe and the Gentiles demanded that God do something that makes more sense than crucifying Jesus. The sin of their requests is that neither the Jew nor the Gentile

is willing to believe what God has done through Jesus on the cross. The world demands that God do something to validate His message of salvation; otherwise the world absolutely refuses to believe the foolishness of the cross.

So how does anyone come to faith in Christ? The answer, God calls them, both Jews and Greeks, to believe. By *call* Paul does not mean that God only invites sinners to believe, but he means that God enables resistant sinners to repent of unbelief and turn to Christ in child-like faith. This truth is seen clearly in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. *3And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. 6For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

In 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, we find 2 powerful forces at work against us. First of all, there is our own rebellion and unbelief. Secondly, there is Satan who intensifies our hatred of the truth and the result is our absolute inability to see the truth of the gospel. So what happened? We heard the outward call for salvation as Christ was preached (v5). And then the same God who called light out of darkness in creation (Genesis 1), called us to see the light of the gospel. We were blind in verse 4, but because of the effective call of God working through the preaching of the gospel, we now see the love and light of the good news of Jesus. Once the call of God produces spiritual life we willingly repent and believe and are gloriously brought *into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord* (1 Corinthians 1:9).

The world dismisses the cross as utter foolishness and here is the irony, by rejecting the cross as foolishness, man demonstrates his own foolishness and weakness which are rooted in his depraved rebellion toward God (v25).

2. GOD'S WISDOM IS REVEALED THROUGH THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (1:26-31)

Not only does the cross appear as foolishness to the unbelieving world, but the persons most affected by the cross appear to be fools as well. This is another way that God's wisdom appears as foolishness to the world; He chooses and calls the *foolish* persons and the *weak* persons to comprise His Church. Paul now sets out to prove this by using the Corinthians as his example. He asks them to *consider your calling* (v26).

Paul notes that the God often passes over the wealthy, influential and impressive to call the poor, little-known and ordinary. In verses 27-29, Paul insists that this is done with purpose; *so that no man may boast before God* (v29). The Corinthian version of wisdom led to rivalry, conflict and most obvious, boasting. That alone proves it was not the wisdom of the gospel [James 3:13-18].

In verses 30-31, Paul provides an example of correct boasting; boast only about what the Father has accomplished through the Son. It is by God's choice and God's call that anyone is now in union with Christ. And this was made possible only by Christ's life, death and resurrection. Therefore, *"LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD"* (v31) [See Jeremiah 29:24].

3. GOD'S WISDOM IS REVEALED THROUGH PAUL'S PREACHING (2:1-5)

Paul offers himself as a living illustration of God's wisdom contradicting the world's wisdom. The Corinthians were accustomed to powerful and impressive public speakers, but God sent Paul to them (2:1). In fact, Paul determined not to attempt to impress the Corinthians, but to clearly preach Jesus Christ and His crucifixion (v2). Paul was the exact opposite of what the Corinthians wanted or expected as their instructor. He was physically weak and he was fearful, even to the point of trembling (v3). His message was no more impressive than his appearance; he intentionally avoided manipulation that comes through polished rhetoric (v4). Instead, Paul promoted God's wisdom in the cross and trusted the Spirit to use this kind of straightforward speaking as an opportunity to demonstrate His power. The result of Paul's approach is that Corinthians would not trust in him, but in God and His power to save through the cross of Christ (v5).

CONCLUSION

A pastor's responsibility is to preach a clear and uncluttered gospel. He is to present God's saving work in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and he is to plead with his hearers to be reconciled to God. He is to avoid any manipulative measures, clever self-promotion and anything else that draws his hearers away from the cross. He cannot always be what the congregation wants or expects, but he must be primarily concerned with exalting God and His saving work through Christ.

A church's responsibility is to hear and obey the men who declare the truth to them in the power of the Spirit. A church must outright reject manipulative preachers who seek to turn the gospel into some form of personal gain. We cannot be those who only want to hear sound-bites and refuse to study the word so that we are able to discern its message to us. We cannot be lazy listeners and thinkers; else we will be unable to hear anything but sound-bites.

And together, the pastor and congregation must pray for the Spirit's power upon His Word. It is not enough to show up and preach or show up and listen. We must ask the Holy Spirit to come and teach us so that we obey what is taught.