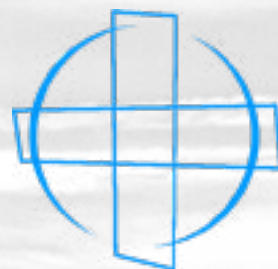


FEBRUARY
2025

Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

UNITED



DONALD J. WILLS
— PASTOR



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Coming soon!



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned into your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30 am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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February 2, 2025



United in Maturity

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Focal Verse:

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

1 Corinthians 2:12

Introduce

This week we will seek to answer two questions which have long eluded mankind: what is maturity and how do we attain it? In general, the world broadly defines maturity as being fully developed physically, mentally, and psychologically. Accordingly, mature people have the ability to think independently and make complex decisions for themselves. Thus, the world assumes that we will always develop mentally as we grow physically. To the world, maturity comes from the wisdom and knowledge we gain through life experiences which present us with new challenges and give us new perspectives from which we can learn. Even so, many people still lack maturity as evidenced by the fact that they repeatedly make the same mistakes despite having this so-called practical experience. Why? Because they focus on the immediate results rather than the long-term implications. Let's illustrate this principle using money as our guide to show the potential progression, or lack thereof, in our thinking from adolescence to adulthood.

Young children, for example, often have very little understanding regarding the concept of money. Suppose we offered a child the choice between ten dollars cash and two pieces of their favorite candy. Overwhelmingly, most children would take the candy over the cash.

Why? At this stage in life, cash has little material "value" to them whereas the candy offers immediate gratification. They can enjoy the fruits of their choice instantly without having to wait. Even though they could have used the cash to purchase



an entire bag of their favorite candy later, they settled for the two pieces they could eat right then. In this way, they lacked the mental maturity to evaluate the long-term implication of their choice. So, they focused on the physical object right there in front of them instead of the more advantageous reward they could have received later.

On the other hand, most teenagers better understand the "value" of money than a child and would take the cash over the candy, but primarily because they could spend

Introduce

it on whatever they wanted. Rather than save the money, they'd spend it immediately to satiate their desires. While they may be able to count and somewhat manage money more effectively than a child, they still don't have a full appreciation for it. For most teenagers, as long as someone else foots the bill, money is no object. They will spend other people's money freely because they don't fully understand the sacrifices they have made or all the expenditures required to have the basic necessities in life. So, they constantly lobby their parents. Even if their parents teach them the danger of debt, the skill of budgeting, and the value of hard work, most teenagers won't fully understand the concept of managing finances until their position in life changes.

At what point then will most people begin to comprehend the responsible use of money? They need a new position which transforms their immature way of thinking and gives them an entirely new perspective. For most, this happens when they start working and paying taxes, have a household independent of their parents, and pay their own bills. When they do, they will start to behave like their parents! They will complain about the cost of everyday items: "I can't believe a fountain drink costs \$4. The electric bill has gone over \$300 again." They learn very quickly how fast their paycheck disappears. They also learn to make tough choices so they can provide for their families and meet their most basic needs. Even then, some people never grow beyond their adolescent way of thinking about their finances. Some adults still use credit cards irresponsibly, racking up huge debt. They lack self-control and constantly impulse buy. They never progress beyond the instant gratification they sought as a child. They never mature in their thinking because their perspective remains limited and never changes.

Biblically, maturity comes from our new position in Christ where we stop living in the moment and look beyond the mere physical to see the eternal. Thus, the wisdom that God imparts gives us a whole new mindset where we now see the everlasting value of our actions in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul contrasts the believer (mature) with the natural man—or the person who doesn't have a relationship with Christ. In reality, the natural man will never truly understand the way the world works because he has rejected the wisdom of God. He doesn't have the Holy Spirit to guide him, so he focuses on the rewards and benefits he can reap right now based on the actions he takes. Just as we saw with the finances above, the natural man wants instant results! For this reason, Willam Barclay describes how the natural man "lives as if there was nothing beyond the physical life and there were no other than material needs."*

As believers, however, we have the wisdom which comes from the Lord and His Holy Spirit to guide us. We have no excuse. We need to be united in maturity to think beyond the moment to see the eternal ramifications of our actions here on earth as God's representatives.

Key
Question

What makes it so difficult in our world to look beyond the moment to see the eternal or spiritual nature of our actions?

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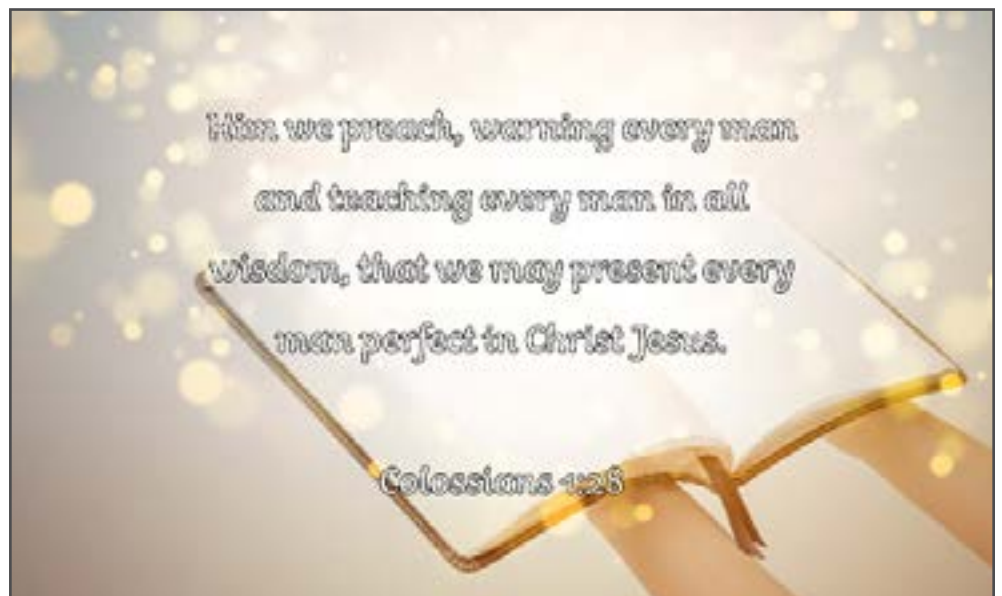
William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), p. 28.

1 Corinthians 2:6-10a

WISDOM THAT LEADS TO MATURITY

In our passage of focus this week, Paul contrasts believers (Christians) with non-believers (non-Christians) to show the advantage we have in Christ who has given us a new mindset and perspective. Whereas those people who don't have a relationship with Christ view the gospel as foolishness or nonsense, we who have relationship understand its **wisdom**. In other words, the gospel makes complete and total sense to us! For this reason, Paul notes how his mission team speaks **wisdom among those who are mature** (v. 6). Such **mature** people can understand the gospel message and rightly apply it. But who **are** the **mature**? To answer this question correctly means that we must understand the larger context of the passage (2:6-16). Here, the phrase **those who are mature** refers to every believer. It does not refer to a class of more spiritually enlightened or elite believer. To see Paul as referring to the "spiritually elite" or a certain class of "**mature**" believer is problematic because such thinking created divisions in the church which he has already strongly condemned (1:10-17). Based on their perceived giftedness and intellect, some believers had already begun regarding themselves as spiritually superior to others. Paul does not play into their hand here. Rather, he contrasts the believer (**mature**) with the **natural man** to show that we all have the same advantage over the non-believer. Only later will he deal with those believers who live like the world and have not progressed in their faith as they should (3:1-4).

In Christ, every believer has the same advantage so to speak over the non-believer because the moment we begin our relationship with Him the Holy Spirit comes to indwell our hearts and guide our paths. Because the same Spirit lives within every believer, we all have the same ability to understand and apply the gospel! To take full advantage and progress in our faith as we should, we need only surrender ourselves completely



into His control and spend time developing our relationship with Him through prayer, Scripture, and fellowship with other believers. It's that simple. We all have the same opportunity to exhibit a mature faith in Him. As we will learn in chapter 3, the problem in lacking maturity resides with us. We don't give the Spirit full control. We become lazy and lack commitment. We think shortsightedly, looking at the temporal rather than the eternal. And we attempt to take matters into our own hands rather than allowing Him to lead us according to His will.

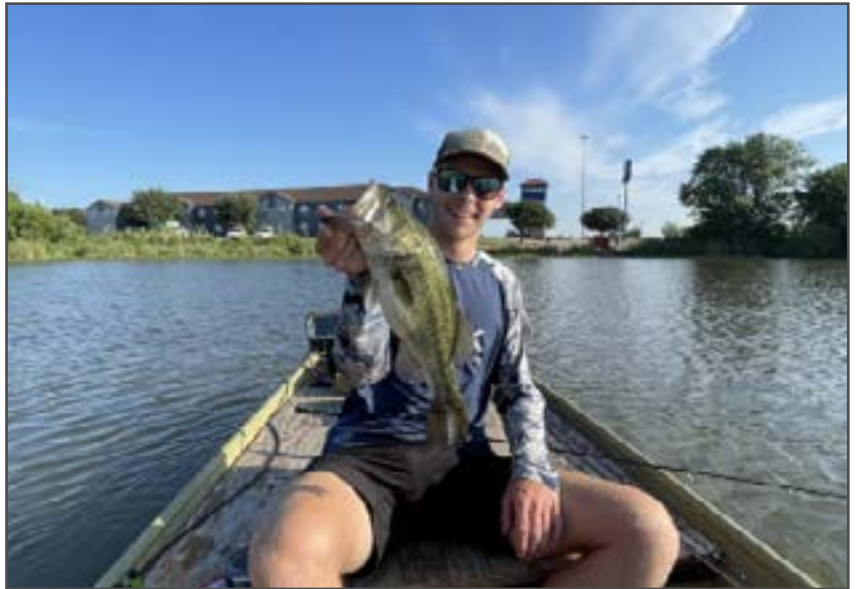
Question
1

What are the marks of maturity in a believer? Why is it hard sometimes for people to maintain consistency in maturing in Christ?

But, for this discussion, we must keep the distinction that Paul wishes to make between believers and non-believers in the back of our minds. The **mature** (i.e., believer) can understand the gospel and its implications because the Holy Spirit makes it possible (2 Peter 1:19-20). On the other hand, the non-believer has no chance of understanding without the Holy Spirit. The gospel makes absolutely no sense to them. While they may be able to understand it somewhat cognitively or mentally as one would read a novel or work of history, they cannot fully appreciate its spiritual implications. Non-believers can't comprehend the gospel's true benefit because it stands counterintuitive to everything the world teaches—the great reversal which we studied last week (1 Cor 1:26-31). More importantly, the gospel has no impact upon them because it cannot transform their lives since God's Holy Spirit does not reside within them who can help them apply its principles effectively.

We can illustrate this difference between believers and non-believers' comprehension of the gospel through some of the seemingly ordinary conversations we may have had at times. After worship a few Sundays ago, I had the privilege of eating lunch with several of our young adults. Over the course of our time together, we engaged in many different topics of conversation, including some of the injuries and ailments we've suffered in sports or activities. Hannah Buckles, a nursing student at Tarleton State, gave a most eloquent and detailed explanation of some of the most common injuries and how they affect specific tendons, ligaments, and muscles. Although we all could generally relate and even follow some of what she conveyed,

much of the discussion went over our heads—even though she did use hand gestures and point to help clarify. This prompted Noah Miller to ask at one point, “Is this how you feel when I talk about hunting and fishing?” To Noah’s point, those who are uninitiated and haven’t become completely immersed in a topic can only understand at a very basic level while those who have studied and become immersed in the topic understand in-depth. While we may be able to follow a conversation such as these and add a bit from experience here and there, we generally feel like a fish out of water when we have very little knowledge or interest in a subject. We’ve all likely had a conversation such as this where we sit and politely listen, but it makes little sense other than we can follow the basic points!



The non-believer views the gospel in much the same way as such a complicated topic. It’s completely foreign to them. It’s a mystery that they don’t understand nor can they ever understand fully without the Holy Spirit penetrating their hearts and explaining the message. Therefore, true wisdom comes only through the Holy Spirit who reveals God’s plan in Christ. This goes back to Paul’s point 2:1-5 where he previously explained that he did not come with persuasive words to convince the Corinthians of their need for salvation; he left the work of conviction to the Holy Spirit. Paul came with a simple message: “Christ crucified” and nothing else. This reinforces the point that our faith should be in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men! For without the effective work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we would not understand and respond to the gospel.

Question
2

What concepts or ideas in Scripture do non-believers have the most difficult time grasping about the gospel?

Once again, Paul emphasizes that his mission team does **not speak the wisdom of this age** or of **the rulers of this age** or of those **who are coming to nothing**. The

Instruct

wisdom of this world espoused by human scholars, experts, authorities, and politicians always leads to destruction. The phrase **who are coming to nothing** points back to the great reversal in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 where God takes the perceived “somebodies” of this world who currently have power, wealth, influence, and wisdom and He makes them “nobodies” because they have rejected Him. God has exposed them all as frauds. He has shown them to be fools who have no clue how the world really works. Their self-reliance and independence have become their downfall because they have arrogantly rejected God’s plan in favor of their own.

Thus, in the world’s **wisdom**, they regarded Jesus as a threat, an outsider challenging their authority and circumventing world order, so they **crucified** Him. Certainly, Jesus did challenge their power and upend normal social order—not to establish some temporary physical kingdom, but to bring eternal life to a world held captive by sin. **The rulers of this age** are not the demonic forces, powers, and principalities to which sometimes Paul refers (Eph 6:12; 2 Cor 4:4), but rather the human authorities who physically sentenced Christ to death (Col 2:15). Indeed, he makes this explicit in verse 8 when he declares that **none of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**. Consequently, these **rulers** would have included both Jew (the high priest, priests, Pharisees, and Sadducees) as well as Gentile (Herod and Pilate). These **rulers**, therefore, only looked out for their self-interests and could not see the eternal purpose for which Christ had come. They had become spiritually blind because of their own arrogance and self-reliance. If they **had known** why Jesus truly had come, **they would not have crucified** Him; they would have crowned Him as Savior and hailed Him as King.

Question
3

What things cause spiritual blindness and shortsightedness today?

In contrast to the **wisdom** of the world, Paul and his team **speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory** (v. 7). The **mystery** is God’s self-revelation through Christ whereby He displayed His power over sin and death through the cross. In doing so, He also demonstrated His grace and love to us in offering forgiveness for our sins. An infinite, all-powerful God took on finite flesh to deal with the sin problem that we could not deal with on our

own! Mankind, on his own, can never understand such fantastic love and sacrifice on our Creator's behalf apart from the Spirit! Yet, before God ever spoke the world into existence and formed man from the dust of the ground, He had a plan in place to deal with our obedience. He had a plan to remove our shame—the shame of sin and disobedience—and give us a place of honor and glory in eternity with Him through His Son.

In His omniscience, God knew that Adam would try to cover his own shame. And he did. Adam and Eve had sown fig leaves together to cover their nakedness and hid themselves from the Lord when He approached during the cool of the day (Gen 3:7-8). However, God knew Adam's remedy was insufficient to deal with sin. But He also knew that the blood of animals would be insufficient as well (Heb 10:1-4). To rid the world of sin and conquer death, it would require a superior once-and-for-all sacrifice. It would require that He come Himself and die for the very people He created! Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, man has tried to recover his own honor and glory apart from God. But only God can restore such an image tarnished by sin!

During my travels, I began collecting commemorative spoons from some of the places that I've been. A few of them actually contained a small amount of silver. So, over the years, they have

become tarnished with oxidation. One year, I tried cleaning them. I got a scrubbing pad along with some water and began to scrub. Other than putting scratches into the spoon and smearing the oxidation, it did practically nothing. It actually made it worse. After doing some research, I bought bottle of chemical solution, mixed it with water as directed, and put the spoon in to soak. A little while later, I removed the spoon and wiped it with a cloth and it looked nearly as good as new. All the tarnish had disappeared. Similarly, God has the only solution for our sin. He preordained this solution even before creating us. But man in his foolishness tries to do it the hard way. Just like the tarnish on the spoon, we scrub and scrub our lives, but to no avail. We try



Instruct

to change. We attempt to initiate reform, but we can't. We desperately want to prove our worth, but we end up failing. We make an even greater mess of things! May we learn from our past mistakes and henceforth do things God's way!

Question # 4

In what ways do we sometimes foolishly try to garner praise and accolades in the church even under the guise of serving the Lord?

To conclude this section, Paul offers scriptural support. He appeals to a combination of Isaiah 64:4 and 65:16 which he has summarized here: **"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."** This reference to Isaiah serves to underscore how the **natural man**, that is the one who does not have a relationship with the Lord, cannot understand the things of God. God's **wisdom** can only be known by His people whom He describes here as **those who love Him**. Ironically, throughout the book of Isaiah as well as the Prophets in general, many people in Israel claimed to know the Lord and understand His ways, but they really didn't. Had they truly understood the Lord and His purposes in their lives they would have repented and served Him alone. Instead, many people took delight in religious rituals performed sanctimoniously while they still acted rebelliously and immorally. They followed the path of the culture around them instead of the plan that God had established for them.

God does not tolerate sin. He doesn't delight in mere platitudes and ritualistic service. God demands obedience. He desires faithfulness spurred on by our love for Him. Sometimes those who deceive themselves the most are the ones who consider themselves "religious." They work hard outwardly to put a good foot forward, but in reality they don't know the Lord. They've never turned from their sins and trust in Christ. They have never experienced any genuine transformation in their lives! In Isaiah's day, many in Israel lived this way! They professed to know God and outwardly seemed



BUT THEN, INDEED, WHEN YOU DID NOT
KNOW GOD, YOU SERVED THOSE
WHICH BY NATURE ARE NOT GODS.

GALATIANS 4:8

to do all the right things, but God says this about them in His Word: “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (Isa 1:3). They didn’t truly understand; they had no relationship with Him.

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

THE MESSENGER WHO IMPARTS WISDOM

If the **natural man** cannot know the **wisdom** of God on his own, then how can he know it at all? Paul explains that the Holy **Spirit** reveals God’s **wisdom** to people (v. 10). **The Spirit searches all things—the deep things of God**—and makes them known to us! **The deep things of God**, in this case, specifically refer to salvation and how we can have a relationship with Him. In this way, **the Spirit** serves as God’s agent of self-revelation to His people. **The Spirit** communicates the depths of God’s **wisdom** by making the cross and salvation understandable.

Yet, on another level, **the deep things of God** can also include anything that God wishes to reveal about His character, His thoughts, or His plans. On our own, we cannot understand anything about the Lord except that which He chooses to reveal to us through His **Spirit** because as God disclosed to Isaiah, “My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9). Not only does **the Spirit** help us to understand the basic components of God’s plan for our life in general, but He also helps us to trust God even when we don’t understand fully everything in life that happens. **The Spirit** reassures us that God remains in control and will accomplish that which He has determined to do. He continually displays God’s presence among us and gives us the most basic information that we need to trust Him to make the right decisions. Above all, Scripture serves as the main source which **the Spirit** uses to communicate these things about the Lord. In Scripture, God has communicated everything about His plan, character, and thoughts if we would only take the time to listen and allow the Spirit to speak to us.

Question
5

Why is Scripture sufficient for understanding who God is? Why should it be a red flag when someone says that the Spirit revealed something “new” to them about the Lord not found in Scripture?

Instruct

By way of illustration, Paul asks a rhetorical question: **What man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him** (v. 11)? If we look closely, the answer is explicit within the question itself. Only the man who has formulated the thoughts in his own mind can truly know them! We cannot look at a person and pretend to know what they are thinking! We may be able to have a good guess, but sometimes assumptions can lead to wildly inaccurate judgments! How many of us have been misjudged by someone or we ourselves have misjudged someone just on the basis of circumstantial evidence? Probably we all have experienced this at some level in life. Only an individual knows his own thoughts. Paul is not advocating a tripartite division of man (i.e., body, soul, and spirit) here, but rather he is simply using an analogy. Humanly speaking, no one can know our inner thoughts except we ourselves. Likewise, God Himself (i.e., **the Spirit**) only knows His inner thoughts.



Unfortunately, many people have a wildly inaccurate image of God because they have not listened to the Holy Spirit. Such people create a "God" in their own image. They mold God according to their own desires to fit their expectations. Rather than allow **the Spirit** to show them who God is, they have formulated their own preconceived ideas of who God ought to be. For example, many misguided people would errantly claim that a loving God would not send people to hell for their sins. They make this statement to justify their sins and assuage their guilt, allowing them to pursue their own desired path rather than follow the path the Lord has ordained for them. But this perception of God doesn't correspond with God's known character from Scripture. As a righteous God, He must punish sin and disobedience. As a loving God, He has made a way through the cross for us to have life in Christ, but we must choose to accept it. Thus, the burden lies with us: Do we choose to follow God or do we choose to blaze our own path? With this, we must remind ourselves of what Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Question
6

What other inaccuracies do you see peddled about God in our world today?

On our own, we cannot figure God out because His ways do not come naturally for us. They contradict our natural instincts warped by sin, so we need the Spirit to illuminate our minds to the truth! Our finite, corrupt minds cannot grasp God's holy and righteous character without help. Thus, Paul states emphatically that **we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God** (v. 12). God has sent His Spirit so that **we might know the things that have been freely given**. That which is **freely given** here refers to God's grace in salvation. Once again, Paul's main point since 1:18 is that God has clearly communicated His method of salvation to us (i.e., the cross), but many have rejected it because they consider it nonsense and foolish. They can't understand why God chose to give life through a heinous death on the cross. But for those who have received salvation and the Spirit indwells us, we understand exactly why God acted this way. Hebrews 9:22 sums it up best: "And without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Someone perfect had to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could share in His life when we trust in Him.

And according to the law
almost all things are purified
with blood, and without
shedding of blood there is no
remission.

Hebrews 9:22

This realization that our understanding of God comes from the Spirit working through Scripture should lead us to draw two major implications. First, there is no room for "spiritual" pride in the life of any believer. One believer is not morally or spiritually superior to any other believer in the sense that we all have access to the same Spirit and the same information about God. We can all pray to God directly. We can all read His Word with insight. Therefore, we all have the same ability to progress in our faith and achieve great things which the Lord has set before us to do. Because we all have the same Spirit, we ought to all seek to fulfill the same purpose: to glorify the Lord by building His kingdom. Therefore, we ought to work together humbly, using our

different areas of giftedness to serve in the church just as God has called us.

Unfortunately, spiritual pride had become a point of major contention in the Corinthian church where some believers saw themselves as superior over others. Such a spirit destroyed the unity within the church pitting believer against believer rather than standing united against the enemy to advance the gospel boldly into the world. Consequently, we should recall what Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Although no believer has yet been perfected in this life (1 John 3:1-2), we should all still see a steady progression in our faith toward Christ-likeness every day. If we don’t see that progress, then we must ask ourselves why. Generally, any lack of progress can be attributed to a failure on our part to surrender our lives to the leadership of the Spirit and allow Him to produce the mind of Christ within us that helps us to conform ourselves to His character.

Question
7

How do we see spiritual pride sometimes manifested in the church?

Second, we must also look at the implications of the Spirit upon how we engage in evangelism and share the gospel. Although we discussed some of this last week, it bears repeating again. Our job as believers is to give a simple, clear presentation of the gospel. We should focus on the main issue—Christ crucified—and what that means for us as sinners. In certain contexts, we can contextualize the gospel to help people better understand as God leads us, but we must always exercise extreme caution that we don’t actually obscure the meaning. The gospel is simple enough without us trying to make it even more so. Rather than seeking to be novel and creative, stick to the simple message God has given us in Scripture: Jesus died for our sins, God raised Him from the dead, repent, and trust in Him!

Furthermore, our job is not to convince or even convict people of their sin, but to compel them to look beyond the present and see the eternal impact of their choices. Only the Holy Spirit can truly illuminate their minds and help them to understand God’s wisdom which is so counterintuitive to the world. We can have the most eloquent, sophisticated presentation comparable to any academic paper, but people will still reject it. While we must resolve to be obedient to take the gospel into all the world, we should leave the results to Spirit. We can’t allow ourselves to become despondent when

someone doesn't respond in the way we think he or she should. Rather, we must continue undaunted in our task to evangelize as God has commanded.

Finally, we don't need to fret over having all the answers to their objections or questions. Instead, we need to point them to the one who does—the Bible. This requires that we study (2 Tim 2:15) and prepare to have an answer ready (1 Peter 3:15), but that we still rely on the Spirit to guide us



in what to say (Matt 10:19). If they are desperately seeking the truth, like the Ethiopian eunuch, make time to sit with them and help them understand the Scripture. The Holy Spirit will help you know what to say as you read through God's Word together—after all He knows the mind of God and can communicate it much more effectively through His Word than we ever could on our own. If God grants you the opportunity to disciple someone like the Ethiopian eunuch, don't become sidetracked if they bring up ancillary issues. Remain focused. Remember to keep the main point the main topic of discussion! Keep pointing them to the truth of God's Word. Perhaps, their eyes will be one day opened.

Question
8

How does knowing the role of the Holy Spirit in fostering understanding of the gospel give us confidence to speak it boldly and clearly?

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

WISDOM THAT TRANSFORMS THE MIND

Paul again belabors the point that **the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to Him** (v. 14). Neither **can he** understand **them because they are spiritually discerned**. In this verse, we see three characteristics of the **natural man**. First, he has rejected the things of God (v. 14a) because he is incapable of understanding them; he regards them as foolish (v. 14b). The **natural man** is incapable of understanding because he does not have the Spirit—which indicates clearly that he does not have a relationship with Christ (v. 14c). Hence,

Instruct

the **natural man** cannot discern or judge the things of God—they have no way of seeing them from His perspective. He has a skewed perspective of right and wrong because he can only see things from his perspective influenced by the culture.

On the other hand, the **spiritual** person can judge **all things**. The term “**spiritual**” means led by the Holy Spirit. Because he is led by the Spirit, he can discern right from wrong. He can see things from God’s perspective. Moreover, those led by the Holy Spirit will find themselves under no condemnation from others because they will be in right standing with the Lord. They will live righteously with integrity. They will follow God’s plan for their lives. This doesn’t mean that they cannot err from time to time or make a mistake, but that they will consistently exercise good judgment and righteous living because they have surrendered themselves to the Spirit. Whereas the **natural man** cannot pass judgment against the believer since he himself does not have the Spirit to guide him, the believer can pass judgment on the non-believer’s actions to determine if they follow God’s holy standard. In this case, judgment does not mean condemnation of sin which only rightfully God Himself can do, but rather discernment. The believer can inspect the fruit of person to see whether it is truly from God or not (Matt 7:15-20). Per his usual pattern, Paul supports his conclusions with Scripture by quoting Isaiah 40:13. Because believers have the **mind of Christ**, they have insight into God’s wisdom which the world can never possess.

Question
9

What is the difference between discernment/judgment and condemnation? Why must believers with the mind of Christ be discerning?

As believers, God has given us His Spirit which has set us apart from the rest of the world. His Spirit helps us to have the ability to look beyond our present physical circumstances to the eternal and in so doing provides us with the understanding of God's plan for our lives. The world, on the other hand, lacks such maturity. They can only see the short-term. They only see the things right in front of them. Thus, the world focuses on instant gratification at the peril of their soul's eternal destination. God's Word is not so difficult to understand. It contains an absurdly simple message, yet many people fail to understand. In our skewed human condition, God's Word doesn't seem logical because it upends our understanding of the world, so many consider it foolishness. Many see His plan as nonsense so they venture out on their own to their own demise. As believers, we can know and understand God's wisdom because His Spirit has revealed the mind of Christ to us. Thus, we have all the resources we need to mature in our thinking by conforming our minds to His and living according to how His Spirit leads.

Incorporate

How does spiritual pride and the lack of maturity (progress in our faith) hinder the mission of the church today?

In what ways has God given us spiritual discernment to help us navigate life?

From Scripture, what are some of the key characteristics which would indicate that we have the mind of Christ?

Journal: Document God's Work

February 9, 2025



United in Ministry

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

Focal Verse:

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 3:11

Introduce

In the nineteenth century as the United States expanded Westward into the sparsely populated frontier of the Great Plains, entire towns would often band together to welcome new settlers and help them plant roots in their rural communities. Even if these new settlers had large families with plenty of working-aged children, to establish themselves on the frontier while preparing for Winter often proved more work than they could possibly do on their own. Using hand tools powered by the sweat of their brow, these families would toil from dawn to dusk every day with little rest, struggling to provide for their daily needs while at the same time preparing for their immediate future.

Think of everything these individuals would need to accomplish in only a few months to survive their first brutal Winter on the Plains. They would need to clear their land first so they could plant their crops. This meant that they not only had to till the soil and sow their seeds, but also remove any rocks and cut any trees in the way before they could ever expect a harvest in the Fall. At the same time, these families would need to dig wells, build their houses, and erect fences to corral their livestock. Finally, they would need to build a barn to shelter their animals and store their harvests.



Recognizing the struggle for these new arrivals, townspeople would join together for a “barn raising.” In a single day, usually concluding with a grand celebration in the evening, the community did what would have taken the new settlers many months to do on their own. Early in the morning, the men would all gather at the site. Although they all shared a common goal, each man had a particular role and set of responsibilities that would contribute to the success of the project. Some men would begin by leveling and preparing the site for the barn. Without the aid of a sawmill, other men would harvest the lumber for the project, plan it, and cut it into useful pieces of timber. Still, other men would concentrate on building specific parts of the structure. Some would frame the walls. Some would work on the siding. And others would work

Introduce

on the eaves and roofing. While the men worked on the physical structure, the women of the town would prepare the meals, particularly the sumptuous evening meal which everyone would enjoy as they celebrated.

Collectively, the town accomplished more in one day than single families could do in many months. They united for a common purpose to achieve a specific goal. Everyone played a role. Everyone contributed as he or she was enabled and gifted. The townspeople acted selflessly for the common good of the community. In a way, God has called us to act selflessly for the common good of His community. He has called us to work together for a specific purpose to achieve a common goal. He has given us various roles and responsibilities as His people, but only one goal. He has asked us to be united in ministry to glorify Him by building His Kingdom—the church. Since God has already laid the foundation through Jesus Christ, He expects us to build wisely by focusing on the eternal implications of our actions rather than the mere temporal benefits we may seek in the flesh.

Key
Question

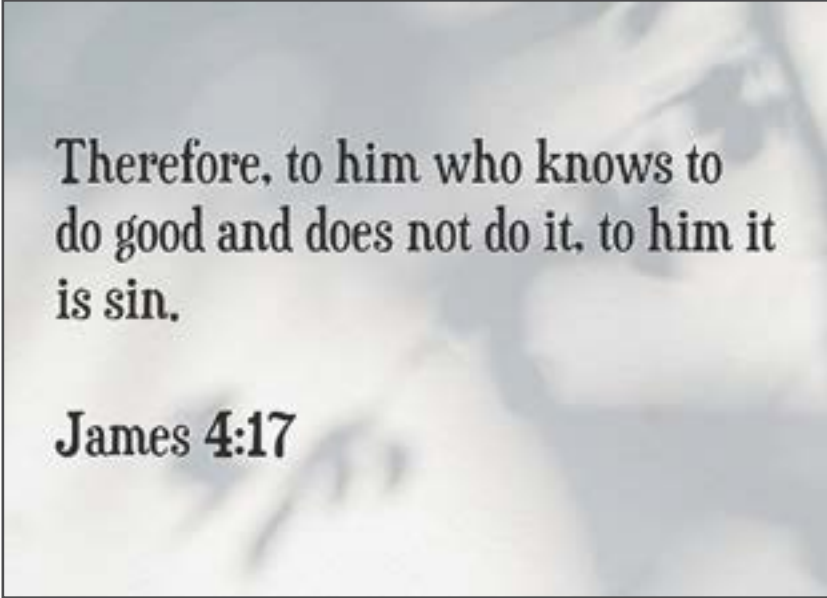
What are the main purposes for which God has called us to unite as a church? How effectively are we accomplishing

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

THE FLESH WHICH DISRUPTS

Paul opens this chapter with a scathing rebuke of the Corinthians because of their lack of **spiritual** maturity. Although he refers to them as **brethren** indicating that he regards them as genuine believers who have a relationship with Christ, he grieves that he **could not speak** to them **as to spiritual people but as to carnal and babes in Christ** (v. 1). As we learned last week, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives distinguishes us from the “natural man” or the person who does not have a relationship with Christ. At the moment of our salvation, the Spirit comes to indwell our hearts, transforming us to display the righteous works of our Savior (Rom 8:39; Gal 3:2-3; Titus 3:5-7). We can now do these works which please the Lord precisely because the Spirit has revealed “the mind of Christ,” giving us a completely new perspective through which we see the world through His eyes and understand His will for our lives (1 Cor 2:16).

Instead of following the leadership of the Holy Spirit and manifesting His righteousness, the Corinthians have allowed their flesh to dictate their outlook and determine their walk. The word translated **carnal** here by the NKJV means “fleshly.” Paul often uses this word negatively in reference to man’s sinful desires and passions. When paired with **spiritual** in this context, it signifies being controlled by the sinful flesh as opposed to being led by the Spirit. Moreover, Paul intentionally uses a different term here to describe the **carnal** or fleshly believer than he does to describe the “natural” man in 1 Corinthians 2:14. Why? The “natural man” has no relationship whatsoever with Christ or His Spirit. He, therefore, has no **spiritual** insight at all. The believer, by virtue of his relationship with Christ, has the Spirit present in his life. This makes the Corinthians’ actions much worse than the “natural man” because they know better! They have the Spirit to guide them, but in their stubbornness they still act like the world around them instead of imitating the character



Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

James 4:17

Instruct

of Christ. For simplicity, we would call this hypocritical today.

Think of it this way. From our perspective which of the following would be worse: A child who does not know what it means to steal and takes candy without paying for it or an adult who knows the consequences of stealing, but does it anyway? While both would receive punishment for their actions because they're wrong, the one who defiantly takes the candy despite having the knowledge of wrongdoing is even more culpable (responsible) for his actions. For this reason, James reminds us, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jas 4:17). The Corinthians prided themselves on being **spiritual** or mature, but they acted like mere infants or **babes**.

In this context, Paul uses the term infants to persuade the Corinthians to abandon their worldly, sinful behavior altogether. He doesn't use it as to describe the maturation of our faith in the sense of gaining a deeper understanding into God's wisdom and Word as many modern people have come to understand it. That's not Paul's point here at all. To have proper understanding of God's wisdom, we must have both good theology and good application. Here, Paul is more concerned with the application of our knowledge in Christ. He urges the Corinthians to live out their salvation through righteous works and a ministry of service. While we must have the correct knowledge about God's Word and His plan for our lives, the application is just as important!

In a popular meme circulating on YouTube, some enterprising individuals have edited a Michael Jordan advertisement against illicit drug use to one single phrase, "Stop it; get some help." These individuals have then applied this phrase to numerous, wide-ranging situations. Sometimes they even let this phrase just speak for itself. Like this meme of Michael Jordan, Paul tells the Corinthians the same thing, "Stop it. Stop acting like mere infants. Stop acting like the world!" Through the Spirit, they have all the help they need! As believers, they have the power to overcome these urges and impulses where the natural man does not because they have access to the Holy Spirit living within them. They have no excuse for continuing to behave like the world around them!

Question
1

How would you evaluate your life personally: do you live like a mere infant in Christ or do you live as mature guided by the Spirit? What evidence can you site?

Therefore, Paul explains that he has **fed** them **with milk** rather than **solid food** (v. 2). By now, they should exhibit a transformed life characterized by righteousness instead of the sinful dysfunction occurring within their community. They **were not able to receive** these spiritual things and **are still not** because they have allowed themselves to be controlled by the flesh rather than the Spirit. Through this illustration, Paul essentially explains that he has given them **milk**, which represents the basic message of the gospel, but they have failed to progress to **solid food** meaning that they have not understood the nature of their salvation and applied it. In other words, they are not living out their salvation through their changed lives! They are not applying what they should have learned in Christ.



An exasperated Paul now explicitly charges the Corinthians with still being **carnal** or governed by the flesh (v. 3). Through their actions, we can identify two prominent traits of a fleshly character. First, a fleshly mindset produces **jealousy and strife**. Life becomes a constant competition. Fleshly-minded people seek to have the most prestige, the most power, and the most possessions. They want to be first in everything in life because they focus only on the here and now rather than the eternal. Second, and a natural extension of the first, a fleshly mindset creates **divisions** within the church. As **spiritual** people, the Corinthians must change their perspective; they must exhibit “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). No longer should they walk as “**mere men**” according to the desires and expectations of this world (1 Cor 7:17). They should not selfishly look to their own interests and desires. They should not be self-serving and self-centered. On the contrary, they should walk in the Spirit and bear the fruit of righteousness consistent with Christ’s character. They should conduct themselves as servants who humbly and obediently represent their Master by looking out for the needs and well-being of others (Phil 2:1-4; Mark 10:45).

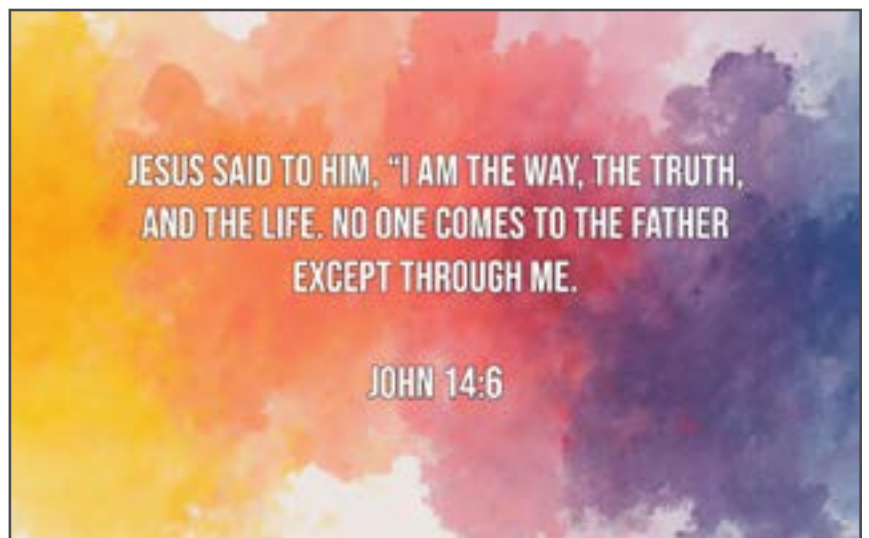
Question
2

Besides these two characteristics listed here, what other traits would characterize a person controlled by the flesh?

Furthermore, the Corinthians should not engage in any activity which causes **division** in the church. In language similar to 1:10-17, Paul highlights the divisions currently present among them, particularly those who have affiliated themselves with him or **Apollos**. Some Corinthians have dangerously aligned themselves with the personality of the preacher rather than the person and message of Christ; therefore, some say, “**I am of Paul**,” while others say, “**I am of Apollos**” (v. 4). Rhetorically, Paul asks, “Is this not a fleshly mindset?” Christ, not **Paul, Apollos**, or any other human leader for that matter, should be the center of our attention! Only Christ, not the messenger of the gospel, has the power to save!

Why does Paul single out those who follow him or **Apollos**? What point does he wish to make by pointing out these divisions? Perhaps, these represent the two main rival factions in the church. It has become a popularity contest between groups of members who have aligned themselves with **Paul** or **Apollos**. But overall, this is really insignificant. It really doesn't matter that Paul lists just the two groups here instead of the four he mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12. The main idea remains clear: no **division** should exist because Christ is not divided (see 1 Cor 1:13). Our focus should reside on Christ and not the popularity of individuals!

For this reason, Paul asks two rhetorical questions: **Who is Paul** and **who is Apollos**? **Paul** and **Apollos** are merely servants; they are only messengers of the gospel. Thus, Paul answers the question by reminding them that they are only **ministers through whom they believed** as the Lord gave them **opportunity** to communicate the gospel. In His teaching, Jesus must also remind His disciples at points that the student is not greater than his Teacher (Mark 10:41-45; Luke 22:25-27). The messenger in the grand scheme of things is nothing whereas the Message is everything, for only through the proclamation of the gospel can we have knowledge of salvation! Thus, Christ crucified and resurrected must always be our focus! The Bible reveals the knowledge of salvation and Christ has completed the work of



salvation on the cross. We are only the messengers who bear the good news, but Christ alone is the source of our salvation!

What does all this mean for us as believers? We all have the same access, the same resources, the same goal, and the same purpose in Christ through the Spirit. We have no excuse for not maturing in our faith and displaying the righteous fruit for which God has called us. Even though we have been given the same Spirit to help us in our daily walk, some believers choose to use what they have received differently. To borrow an idea from finance, let's say a benefactor gave us all \$100. Each person has the same resource so to speak, but each one will choose differently how he uses it. Some will spend it frivolously and use it up immediately like the prodigal son. Some will hold on to it tightly and guard it with their lives, but do absolutely nothing with it. Still, others will invest it. They will use it to invest in eternal or spiritual things that help grow the Kingdom of God.

Some of us may have recognized that this illustration sounds quite similar to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. There, Jesus uses a similar example to critique the church's readiness to receive Him when He returns and describe how He will one day judge the way we participated in the work which He left us to do as His representatives. Therefore, let us ask ourselves, how are we utilizing the Spirit in our life? Have we rejected His guidance and aligned ourselves with the world in order to fulfill our fleshly desires like the Corinthians? Or do we leave Him sitting there like a trophy on our mantel that shows we're a "child of God," but then do nothing else with Him? Or do we allow Him to guide our lives so that we bear fruit according to the ministry to which God has called us? If we have a relationship with Christ, the Spirit lives within us. We have no excuse for immaturity in our lives where we behave like the world. The choice of how we incorporate Him in our walk each day remains up to us. How do you utilize Him each day in your journey?

1 Corinthians 3:6-9

THE FOCUS OF OUR MINISTRY

Paul now explains that unity and cooperation in ministry are the keys to successful Kingdom growth. The individualism and dissension which has so far permeated the Corinthian community has only served to distract from the church's overarching purpose and prevented them from fulfilling God's calling on their lives. Therefore, Paul reiterates that God has called and equipped **each one** of them to

Instruct

minister according to the same purpose (v. 5): to become more like Christ in the way they walk. Moreover, God has also called them to fulfill the same task collectively: to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Even though they have the same purpose, God has assigned them to different roles to accomplish this plan. To illustrate, Paul uses an agricultural analogy to compare the various roles in the church to one who plants and another who waters (v. 6). Although each member of the church has a different role in fulfilling God's plan and purpose, Paul points out that it is **God alone who gives the increase.**

In this analogy, the one who **planted** refers to the initial proclamation of the gospel. Namely, Paul brought the good news of Christ crucified and resurrected to the Corinthians when he came to preach



in their community. As a result, many of them turned from their sins to accept Christ as their Savior. After Paul, another fellow minister named **Apollos** came to continue the work among them. He continued to teach and preach, helping the Corinthians grow in their faith and serve the Lord using their spiritual gifts. Paul, therefore, refers to **Apollos** as the one who **watered** or continued the ministry there in Corinth. Thus, this analogy of planting and watering pictures the spread of the gospel in Corinth in two ways. First, it shows how the missionaries introduced people into a loving relationship with Jesus (evangelism and missions). Second, it shows how others continued instructing them in the Word to produce spiritual transformation within their community (discipleship). These two phrases should sound familiar to us because they reflect part of our God-mandated mission statement here at First Baptist. God has still called us to do these two things today!

Whereas God has tasked **each one** of us to participate in the ministry of the church, He alone **gives the increase!** We cannot make the church grow on our own no matter how hard we may try. To see ourselves at the center of the growth removes the focus from the Lord and puts it squarely upon our own abilities. This often leads to spiritual hubris and pride. If we have the ability to make something grow through our

own power and skill, we would have something about which we could then boast. But we don't! Just like we cannot boast in our good works and are powerless to save ourselves, our boast should never be in what we ourselves can do, but about **the increase** God has given. Even though Paul has already made this same point earlier through the two rhetorical questions in verse 4, he makes it explicit here. The one **who plants** and the other **who waters** are nothing; God, on the other hand, **who gives the increase** is everything (v. 7). Our focus should always reside upon the Lord. Only He **gives the increase** and makes His church grow!



Question
3

What are some of the human means upon which people rely to grow the church?

Several years ago, a Christian publisher sent our church a flyer which read: "How to Grow Your Church." When analyzed biblically, this phrase has two primary problems. First, the church does not belong to us. It belongs to the Lord. We are only stewards to whom He has entrusted certain tasks as His representatives. Notice, for example, how Paul describes us as **God's fellow workers** and as **God's building** in verse 9. We are God's possession—not the other way around! Second, we cannot grow God's Kingdom simply through our own power. We must rely wholly upon Him! Contrary to popular belief, the church does not grow through pure human effort alone, but through divine intervention. God uses **each one** of us to accomplish His will. Kingdom growth is not primarily about having the right program or hook, but about being led by the Spirit, allowing Him to work through us to communicate the gospel, convict the world of sin, and connect them with this local body of Christ.

Question
4

What is the danger of relying purely on human means in an attempt to give increase in the Kingdom?

Overall, this agricultural illustration helps us to understand what it takes to see growth in the Kingdom of God. First, it requires everyone to participate in ministry. If

Instruct

God has called us into a relationship with His Son, He has also called us into service through His church! It takes us all working together to accomplish God's will. If Paul **planted**, but **Apollos** never came to water, it would have hindered the growth somewhat. Could God have still caused the growth or **increase**? Yes, but it would have unduly put a strain on the human resources to accomplish this task. Certainly, God would have strengthened and equipped members of the church to take up the slack, but God designed the church to function collectively as one united body. Therefore, He has purposed that **each one** of us should have a role in participating in the ministry of the church!

Question
5

With what gifts has God given you to use or roles in which He has asked you to serve to accomplish these two tasks within this local church?

Second, such an agricultural analogy shows the dedication and persistence required to cultivate the land or communicate the gospel in order to see kingdom growth. If we have a garden, but never tilled the soil, weeded the beds, or **watered** the plants, the land would become useless and unproductive over time. It requires daily dedication to tend the plants and ensure that they have all the necessary elements to grow in a healthy manner. Spiritual growth in the church occurs in much this same way. It's something to which we must tend daily. We can't take it for granted, but we must actively participate by cultivating our lives through the study of God's Word, prayer, regular fellowship with other believers, and service.

Finally, this analogy shows the patience we need to wait for the growth to occur. Although sometimes church growth happened rapidly in the first century with 3000 or 5000 added in one day, for the most part the growth occurred steadily over time. It required patience to wait upon the Lord to transform the hearts and minds of the people. Even the Corinthians who had been transformed still had to grow significantly because they were participating in immature and sinful activities.



1 Corinthians 3:10-11

THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE BUILD

Although God has called many laborers to participate in the building of His Kingdom, we only have one **foundation** on which we all build (v. 10). Paul now switches from an agricultural analogy to one of construction in order to describe the growth of the church. Thus, both references in verse 9 to **God's field** and **God's building** picture the church as a whole. Christ provides the foundation of the church, but God has called us to participate actively in its numerical and spiritual growth. For this reason, Paul notes that God had **given** him **the grace, as a wise master builder**, to lay **the foundation**. But now, **another builds** upon the **foundation** he himself had **laid**. Just as in the illustration in the previous verses, Paul initially evangelizes Corinth with the gospel and Apollos continues the teaching ministry.

Paul describes himself as a **wise master builder**—not because he has extraordinary skill or wisdom—but because he builds in a way consistent with God's will. He allows the Spirit to lead him concerning how he builds; therefore, he follows God's plan for healthy growth rather than man's. But Paul doesn't do this work alone. Others share in the responsibility. In fact, the entire church must work together to build the Kingdom of God as we have established. Consequently, Paul warns us to pay attention (i.e., **take heed**) **how each one builds** upon this **foundation**. As he will explain in the forthcoming verses, we cannot use shoddy practices, manipulation, or human wisdom or philosophy to grow the church. The growth must come through God **who gives the increase** as people respond to the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. In a way, therefore, God functions as the architect or even general contractor who instructs us how to build. We function merely as the laborers through whom God works.

Question
#6

How are you building upon the foundation of Christ through the church? Specifically, what does this look like in your life?

In sum, the primary concern of the church is to ensure the proper growth of the Kingdom of God by building correctly and purposefully on the **foundation** of Jesus Christ which has already been **laid**. That **foundation** is not "religion" or even ritual; it's not our personal preferences or opinions. The **foundation** is only Jesus Christ and the

Instruct

work that He did on the cross to save us! God seeks a relationship with us through His Son, not meaningless religious rituals which cannot change the heart! Moreover, God has given everyone the responsibility for participating in this growth. It's not the job of the staff or a select few leaders within the congregation, but rather every one of us who calls himself a believer. We all have been called by God to engage in the work of ministry. Therefore, we can measure proper growth in two ways: 1) spiritual growth of the individual members to become more Christ-like (i.e., discipleship) and 2) the numerical growth of the church in which people have been transformed through their relationship with Christ (i.e., evangelism and missions). When tested, these two works of ministry will withstand the test of time and last!



1 Corinthians 3:12-17

THE FRUIT OF OUR LABOR

Finally, Paul describes the results of both effective and ineffective Kingdom ministry in terms of the permanence of the work. As God's workmanship, we should strive to build something which lasts. God Himself will **test** the quality of our work. If we build shoddily upon the **foundation** of Christ, our work will be **burned** up or destroyed which Paul compares to **wood, hay, and straw**. Fire consumes these substances. They stand no chance of survival. When Christ tests the quality of our work, their true quality will become evident.

If built solidly upon the principles of Scripture as led by the Holy Spirit, the work of the church will endure. It will survive this fiery judgment. Comparing those works to **gold, silver, and precious stones**, Paul notes that they will withstand this **test!** Consequently, churches built upon worldly principles, philosophies and personal preferences will eventually collapse because they were not properly built upon the **foundation** in the way God intended. And we see evidence of this all the time even in our own day. On the other hand, those churches built upon the timeless principles of God's Word through His power, strength, and wisdom will last forever! As long as we

at First Baptist follow the Lord, build upon the foundation of Christ, and submit ourselves to the leadership of His Spirit, we will continue to bear fruit just like we have since 1867. The moment we endeavor to build the church upon our personal preferences and opinions through our own strength and skill we will fail. Paul is straightforward here about the results!

Question
7

How would the things you have built so far in your life withstand this test of fire? Would they last or would they burn up? Why?

Therefore, when Paul says, **“If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”** (v. 15). Here, Paul refers to the church itself. If not built upon the foundation of Christ with the proper principles of Scripture, the church will wither and die (see 3:16-17). The penalty is not the loss of salvation because Paul clearly states that the one’s whose works is **burned** up **“himself will be saved.”** Those churches who have not surrendered themselves to the Lord and follow their own fleshly desires will die spiritually because they have lost their first love and become enamored with the culture around them. Movements based solely on the ideas and philosophies of this world will not last! Whereas the things of God will remain forever! Scripture records sage advice from the Pharisee Gamaliel when responding to the Sanhedrin’s threats to Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. Gamaliel cautions, “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even found to fight against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

Broadly speaking, we can identify seven areas of shoddy craftsmanship perpetuated by some churches today which will not stand the test of time: 1) an emphasis upon programs and not Christ, 2) an emphasis upon the personality of an individual instead of Christ, 3) an emphasis on attracting people



Instruct

through entertainment devoid of the gospel, 4) the toleration and acceptance of sin within the church, 5) an emphasis on legalism and ritual rather than relationship, 6) an emphasis on psychology, self-help, or human authors rather than Scripture (i.e., the power of positive thinking and the prosperity gospel), 7) an emphasis on serving selfishly—serving not because of our love for God and the joy we receive from our obedience, but serving because of what we ourselves can get out of it. Such churches may look vibrant and alive to the culture, but in reality they are dead because they have no substance. They have built incorrectly upon the **foundation** of Christ.

Question
8

Specifically, what are some of the shoddy ways you see some churches build upon the foundation of Christ?

Inspire

In our ever-increasingly isolated and independent society, we have somewhat forgotten the value of working together as a community to accomplish a shared goal. Certainly, the barn raisings which we discussed in the introduction were grueling work, but they were also satisfying and rewarding. It was rewarding to look back on the work to see what could be accomplished when we all came together. Since we live in a society dominated by consumerism, most people have become largely apathetic and lazy. They want to be served rather than to serve. Instead of looking for ways that they can serve, they want the church to cater to them. They want the church to meet their needs. Only a few people in the church truly follow Jesus' example and seek to serve rather than be served. As a church, we need everyone serving to advance the gospel so that together God can use us to grow His Kingdom. God has given us a clear mandate. He has given us the foundation upon which to build. And He has also supplied us with the Holy Spirit who tells us exactly how to build so that our work lasts. Let's join together as First Baptist—God's people whom He has called to do the work of ministry and advance the gospel into all the world. It takes us all working together every day to accomplish this God-given task.

Incorporate

In what ways specifically do we all unite as church to accomplish the purpose for which Christ has called us? Can we truly say that we all join together to accomplish it? Why or why not?

In evaluating your life, what things have you built or are building upon the foundation of Christ? When tested by the fiery judgment of Christ, would they truly withstand? Why?

How has God used this lesson to speak to you about your participation in this local church? Can you say you're truly united and building together with God's fellow workers? Why?

Journal: Document God's Work

February 16, 2025



United in Mission
1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5

“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

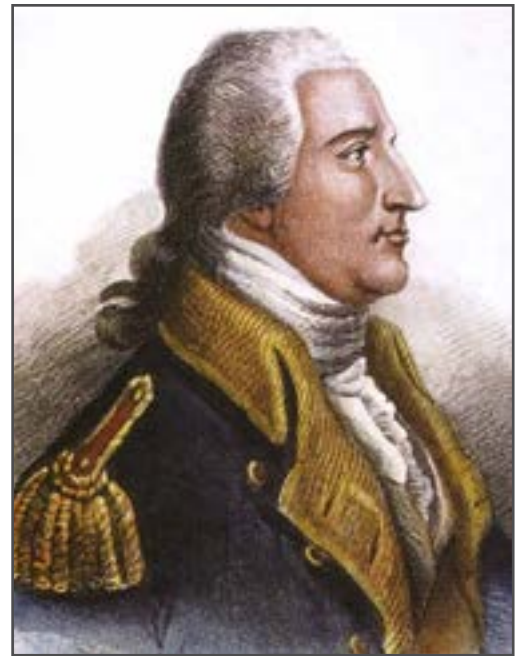
1 Corinthians 4:5

Introduce

When we hear the name Benedict Arnold, the words traitor, treasonous, fickle, and disloyal come to mind. We now even use his name as a euphemism to describe a back-stabbing person formerly regarded as a friend who has been perceived to have wronged us in some way. During the early stages of the Revolutionary War, the American-born Arnold fought valiantly on the side of the Colonies against the British. In fact, he rose to prominence when he helped to capture Fort Ticonderoga in 1775 and subsequently repel British forces who came to avenge their loss. Arnold's heroic effort caught the attention of General George Washington who had recently received the commission to lead the Continental Army. Enamored with Arnold's capability and success, Washington asked him to invade Quebec City to further stifle British control of the region. But this ended with defeat and Arnold being wounded during the battle.

Despite this temporary setback, Benedict Arnold continued nobly fighting against British forces for the first few years of the Revolutionary War (1775-1778). He won decisive battles in the Lake Champlain region of New York, including Saratoga where he stopped the British from advancing and re-taking parts of the Colonies. For this, Washington respected him and regarded him as his "fighting general."* Unlike Arnold, Washington would remain loyal to him, never wavering in his support until the very last moment when he defected to the British side. Being passed over for several promotions in the army, perhaps along with the constant persuasion of his wife sympathetic to the British cause, Arnold began growing disenchanted with colonial forces, so he began exploring other opportunities to enrich himself and advance his personal ambitions.

Although he had begun gaining a reputation as a mercenary working for the highest bidder which caused friction amongst both his colleagues and the newly founded Congress, Arnold eventually received a coveted post at West Point. While there in 1780, however, he would commit the treasonous act for which he has become known today. He would conspire to hand the fort over to the British for the staggering sum of 20,000 pounds! What went wrong? What happened to turn Benedict Arnold who for years had fought with the Colonies? While we may never know the answer for



Introduce

sure, we can see the evidence. He became distracted. He began focusing on himself and his perceived needs rather than the overarching mission. Thus, he began seeing himself as more intelligent, more powerful, and more capable than he truly was. This leads James Martin to ponder, “One wonders if Benedict Arnold had served directly under George Washington’s command instead of detached operations whether his rejection of the American cause might have taken place.”

God expects loyalty and faithfulness from us in undertaking the mission and ministry He has given us as His people. He has entrusted us with the stewardship of His gospel—both living it and communicating its principles as well as safeguarding its message from corruption. To accomplish this mission, it requires that we evaluate ourselves through His eyes according to His perfect standards. We cannot afford to see ourselves as more intelligent, more powerful, and more capable than we truly are. We must realize that we wholly depend upon Him for our wisdom and strength. The moment we become “independent” and attempt to venture on our own we risk becoming distracted in our mission. We will inevitably make a mess of things when we try to do things on our own power! Therefore, we must align ourselves directly under God’s control. We must allow the Spirit to work in and through us so that we don’t become disillusioned by the flesh and controlled by our selfish and sinful passions. Only when we faithfully serve the Lord in every area can we as His people remain united in our mission!

Key
Question

How would you evaluate your faithfulness in fulfilling the mission God has given you as His follower?

In Reference



*James Kirby Martin, “Interview with Mount Vernon” (accessed February 10, 2025), available from mountvernon.org. For additional information, see also J. E. Luebering, “Benedict Arnold,” in *Britannica* (accessed February 10, 2025), available from britannica.com; National Park Service, “Benedict Arnold” (accessed February 10, 2025), available from nps.gov.*

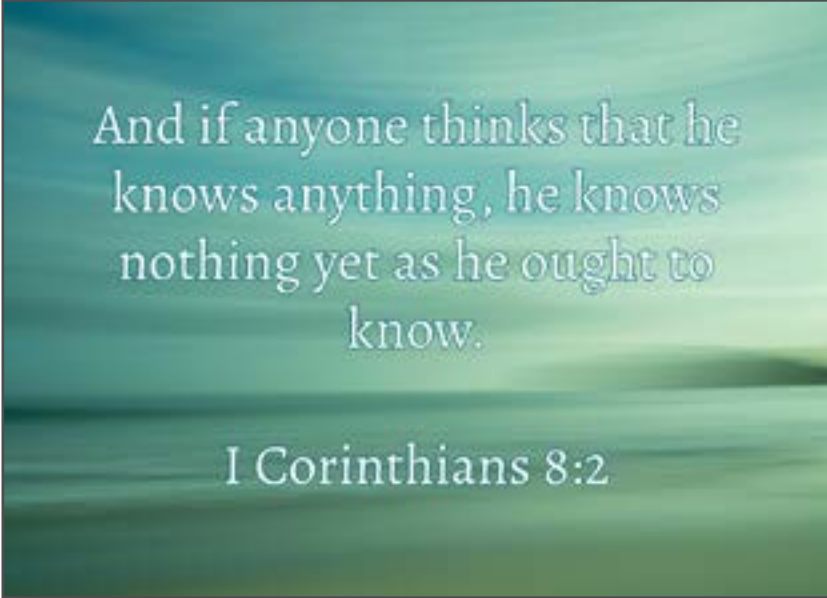
1 Corinthians 3:18-23

SEEK GOD, NOT WORDLY WISDOM

Paul wraps up the section he began in 1:18 by summarizing his argument thus far. He warns us not to **deceive** ourselves (3:18). He reminds us that we should not trust in our own wisdom or the pseudo wisdom which the world offers, but rather we should seek God and the true wisdom which comes only from Him. The wisdom the world espouses leads to destruction whereas the wisdom of God leads to life. Speaking as wisdom personified in Proverbs 8:35, Solomon asserts, “For whoever finds me (wisdom) finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord.” Jesus, as Paul has proven, embodies God’s wisdom (1 Cor 1:30) and through His crucifixion He gives life to anyone who will accept it (1 Cor 2:2). To the world, however, this path to life through Jesus’ death sounds ludicrous and foolish (1 Cor 1:18), but to God it reflects the wise plan He made before the foundation of the world (1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:3-14).

Thus, Paul proposes that **anyone** who considers himself **to be wise in this age** should **become a fool** so **that he may truly become wise**. In other words, we must trust God and rely upon Him because there is wisdom in following His plan which always works. We should never trust in the plan of mere mortals—especially in our own plan—because it will ultimately fail no matter how hard we may try. We **deceive** ourselves when we think we know better than the Lord, for we cannot save ourselves from the penalty of death! The world’s wisdom produces a false sense of hope and security, but their wisdom is not really wisdom at all. The world wrongly believes that we can overcome our problems on our own. If we would simply unite and set our minds on a certain goal, they suppose, we can accomplish anything (Gen 11:1-9). Yet, even the most noble aspiration of mankind will fail because we have no way of dealing with sin on our own. Even in projects that seem outwardly good and appear to unify all people, corruption will still inherently exist!

Unfortunately, we have the propensity to **deceive** ourselves all



And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

I Corinthians 8:2

Instruct

the time as humans! In our minds, we have a different perception of ourselves than reality. Even though we may recognize our weaknesses and shortcomings at times, we often talk ourselves into trusting our own abilities. As we age, for example, we **deceive** ourselves into thinking that we can physically do something which we could once do easily in the past with little or no consequence. In our minds, we still see ourselves as youthful, virile, and capable. Later, however, we realize that we made a big mistake in overestimating our ability and our body's response to our demands. While we may have "completed" the project or participated in the sporting event, we pay a big price for it in the coming days. We can barely get out of bed the next day. Muscles that we never knew existed hurt. Our productivity in our daily tasks suffers because it takes several days to recover fully. We walk around haggardly and feel sluggish; our tiredness affects us both mentally and physically.

Question
1

In what ways do we deceive ourselves, especially when it comes to spiritual matters?

If we don't follow God's plan and overestimate our abilities, we **deceive** ourselves and we will pay the price for it later. Many people **deceive** themselves into thinking that they are morally better than they really are. To God, our personal best is worse than soiled garments (Isa 64:6). One day, when they stand in Jesus' perfectly holy presence, people will see themselves as they truly are. Their foolish and faulty thinking will be exposed! Those who have refused God's gift of salvation in Christ here on earth will experience separation from Him for the rest of eternity. Their end is eternal torment (Rev 20:10; 21:8). For this reason, Paul explains that the so-called **wisdom of this world is foolishness with God** (v. 19). God dwells in reality. Man, on the other hand, who lives in a fallen world has a skewed understanding apart from the Spirit of God enlightening him because he can only see things according to his preferences in the way he wants them to be.

Question
2

How does sin skew our understanding of ourselves and the world around us?

Paul supports his assertions about the inadequacy of human wisdom with two passages from the Old Testament. First, he appeals to the book of Job 5:13: "**He** (God)

catches the wise in their own craftiness.” In critiquing Job’s situation, Eliphaz compares his predicament to that of a wild animal caught by a hunter in a trap in this verse. Because he wrongly believes Job has sinned to cause all this calamity and misfortune, he pictures God as exposing Job’s wicked deeds by catching him in a snare for all to see. Ironically, however, Eliphaz, not Job, is the one whom God has actually entrapped in his pseudo wisdom. He, not Job, has spoken incorrectly about the Lord (Job 42:7). Thus, it shows Eliphaz’s foolishness in trusting his own wisdom rather than truly seeking the Lord. He misspoke and misrepresented God. The principle, therefore, proves true even though incorrectly applied to Job’s case: The wise (like Eliphaz) think they have “mastered” God, but in the end it is God who has ensnared them in their own logical error.



At times, humans have the tendency to make wildly invalid assumptions like in the case of Job’s friends. We misjudge a situation because we don’t have all the information. We often don’t take the time to stop and gather all the information either before jumping to a conclusion. We simply react emotionally. Later, we learn about a vital piece of information that alters our conclusion drastically and we feel embarrassed or even stupid for having reacted so rashly. In other cases, however, people remain in denial. They continue deceiving themselves and others by trying to justify their incorrect conclusion even though they may be privy to the truth. Most likely, we’ve all misjudged a situation because we’ve had incomplete information or interpreted the information incorrectly. For example, it’s like making assumptions based on hearing only one side of a telephone conversation. We could draw some very inaccurate conclusions without knowing the entire context. And some people do! But, God, however, knows the entire context and cannot be fooled which is the point Paul wishes to make next!

Question
3

When have you ever misjudged a situation because you’ve had incomplete information or interpreted the information you did have incorrectly like Job’s friends?

Second, Paul cites Psalm 94:11: “**The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.**” This psalm demonstrates that God understands human reasoning in his omniscience and it is futile to go against His will. Overall, the first half of Psalm 94 calls for justice in a world where evil seems to triumph. Although it may look like some people get away with their wickedness for a time, God will expose their evil deeds in the end. Justice will come. We need to trust in the Lord rather than foolishly take matters into our own hands in these things. For those of us who have placed our hope and trust in the Lord, we know that “unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence . . . but the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge” (Psalm 94:17, 22).

God alone is the source of our strength to endure the hardships and heartaches of this world. Only He can help us navigate the challenges we face in life and overcome our sin to obtain life. Therefore, we should boast in the Lord not in men (v. 20). Truly wise men will acknowledge their complete dependence upon the Lord. None of us has any room to boast in our own accomplishments because we all owe our very lives to God. We belong to Him through Christ (v. 23). Apart from His grace, we all would have gotten what we deserved: the death penalty for our sins. Instead, we have received glorious life in Christ. In Christ, therefore, Paul explains that all things are ours. Every spiritual blessing we have comes from Him alone and not our own merit (see Jas 1:17-18). The Corinthians, however, have mistakenly boasted in their position in Christ as if they had earned it and deserve it. It became a source of spiritual pride that divided the community and distracted from the mission!

So, Paul takes the things in which the Corinthians prided themselves and explains that we all have equal access to the spiritual blessings God gives through Christ. It’s not a competition. Whereas the Corinthians had primarily focused on the popularity and

personality of their leader (i.e., **Paul, Apollos, or Cephas**) or the temporary things of this **world** (i.e., wealth, status, and prestige), Paul points out that there are so many more spiritual blessings which they are missing in both **the things present** and **the**



things to come (v. 22). God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. We lack nothing. Everyone has these spiritual blessings available to them if only he or she would trust Christ and seek Him daily. Thus, Paul once again emphasizes all these blessings **are** ours! We must open our eyes and see all the ways which Christ has truly blessed us!

Question
4

What spiritual blessings may we sometimes miss because we are focused on the temporary things of this world?

Paul concludes by reminding the Corinthians that they belong to Christ and that Christ represents God's gift to them (v. 23). Elsewhere, Paul explains this relationship in terms of an inheritance. God in his grace has given us the same inheritance with Christ. He has made us joint heirs. Everyone has this inheritance available to them. Consequently, no one should **boast** in their position. We all have the same access and the same inheritance through Christ. In Romans 8:17, for instance, Paul highlights this relationship by saying, "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Instead of focusing pridefully on what we have received, may we thankfully acknowledge the gracious blessings of Christ in our lives and focus collectively on the mission which God has given us as His people—a topic to which Paul will now turn.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

SERVE GOD FAITHFULLY

Having reminded the Corinthians about the source of their salvation through Christ, Paul now urges them to be united in their mission. God has called us to work together as people not to compete against one another for priority, position, prominence, and prestige such as the world seeks. Therefore, Paul appeals to himself, Apollos, and Cephas as examples. Although they all are pre-eminent leaders whom God had used mightily which had garnered them notoriety in the early church, Paul asks the Corinthians to consider them (i.e., us) as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (4:1). Rather than measure our success by our wealth, social status, or some superficial human standard, we as believers should measure it by our service—our obedience in fulfilling Christ's call on our lives. If such prominent and influential leaders like Paul and Peter saw themselves as God's servants, so should we. We are all God's servants working together to glorify Him through the local church in which He

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has incorporated us

In addition, Paul also describes them as **stewards of the mysteries of God**. In the first century, a trustworthy slave or servant would be appointed as a steward or household manager who oversaw all his master's affairs. For example, **stewards** would oversee their master's business affairs, including

purchasing, selling, and debt collection. He would also take care of everything in the household, including overseeing the other servants as well as supervising his master's own children. He represented his master in everything and acted on his behalf. Although nothing technically belonged to the steward, his master entrusted him with everything in his possession. In the Old Testament, Joseph held such a role with Potiphar (Gen 39:1-6). Thus, the text notes that Potiphar "left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate" (Gen 39:6).

Here, in 1 Corinthians, Paul qualifies their role as stewards by noting that they had been put in charge of the **mysteries of God**. In other words, God tasked these leaders with safeguarding the message of the gospel so it did not become corrupted by false teaching as well as ensuring that it continued to be communicated around the world by the church. The word **mysteries** refers to the gospel. In fact, Paul has already used this very word in 1 Corinthians 2:1 where he describes how he came to them "declaring to you the testimony (literally, mystery) of God." Elsewhere, Paul often speaks of the gospel as a mystery (see 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:3-9; 6:19; Col 1:24-29; 4:3). He can call the gospel a mystery because it's hard for us as humans to fathom how God could make Himself flesh born of a virgin to live a sinless life that He might die for our sins on the cross. Even more strikingly, He offers all this to us free by His grace after we severed our relationship with Him through willful disobedience!



John 12:26



Colossians 1:28

When we hear the word steward in a sermon, it's almost always associated with financial giving. While Scripture does instruct us to give our tithes and offerings as God has specified (Matt 22:21), stewardship has much broader implications than just focusing on our giving. Here, in chapter 4, God has also called us to be **stewards** of the gospel. Our stewardship of the gospel consists of two primary responsibilities. First, we must ensure we communicate its message accurately and truthfully. We cannot allow it to become corrupted by our personal opinions or preferences. Therefore, the gospel is not about what the text "means to me" in a manner of speaking, but what God has said in the text. The text has one meaning which God intended to communicate to us, but it can have multiple applications which God reveals to us through His Spirit. Therefore, we must seek to hear God speak through His Word and the Holy Spirit helps us do this (2 Peter 1:19-21). Nonetheless, God has given us the job of rightly teaching, communicating, and disseminating His Word (2 Tim 2:15).

Question
5

In what ways do people corrupt the message of the gospel today? How do you ensure that you safeguard its message and interpret Scripture correctly?

Second, stewardship of the gospel involves the Great Commission or evangelism. God has called us to take the gospel into all the world to all people. God has called everyone in the church to declare the gospel! Certainly, God has gifted some particularly as evangelists (Eph 4:11) and called others into full-time vocational ministry. But this does not preclude every layperson from also sharing the gospel. God has tasked us with fulfilling this mission collectively as a church. As we learned in chapter 3, each person plays a significant part in this mission. Although God has gifted us in various ways, we are to use our gifts as a means to share the gospel with everyone whom God places in our path! In general, as a church, we must do better in collectively having everyone share the gospel. Imagine the impact it would make if everyone would do the job to which God has called him.

After listing the duties of a steward, Paul identifies the primary requirement he must exhibit: to **be found faithful** (v. 2). Stewards must be **found** trustworthy or **faithful** in carrying out their master's wishes. They must discharge their duties effectively in accordance with their master's expectations. After all, they represent him

Instruct

and should act on his behalf rather than their own self-interests. As believers, we cannot call ourselves **faithful** if we don't do what our Master has commanded us. If we are not practicing the principles of the gospel by living them out in our lives, we are not **faithful**. Even if we live a relatively good and moral life, but we don't share our faith or communicate the gospel, we cannot call ourselves **faithful**! To **be found faithful**, we must obey God in every area of our lives—not just the ones we find easy or convenient.

Question
6

How would you evaluate your faithfulness to the Lord in every area of life: evangelizing, praying, reading Scripture, serving, giving, etc.?

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

SEE YOURSELF FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

After defining our roles as God's servants and stewards, Paul identifies the only One who can assess or critique our faithfulness. Because the natural man cannot judge spiritual matters at all (1 Cor 2:14-16) and believers can sometimes have a skewed perspective because of the flesh which seizes control from the Spirit (1 Cor 3:1-4), Paul reveals that we as believers are ultimately only accountable to God. Only God who has called us and assigned us these duties has the right to judge us because He can critique our faithfulness with absolute accuracy and impartiality. Consequently, Paul contends that **it is a very small thing** for him to **be judged by** the Corinthians (i.e., **you**) or by a **human court** (v. 3).

The phrase translated by most modern versions as **human court** or "man's judgment" by the KJV literally means "by men of the day." Idiomatically, the expression signifies the exposing of one's deeds (1 Thess

5:5). Daylight shows the deeds for what they truly are. Perhaps, the KJV rendering "man's judgment" thus represents the closest interpretation of what Paul intended to convey. Because human judgment in any form can be corrupted by the flesh, we



should take it as a grain of salt unless the Holy Spirit affirms the evaluation through Scripture. Rather than worry about public opinion, we should align ourselves with the Lord and continue to live righteously as He has specified in His Word. We should simply do the right thing no matter what others may say! In the grand scheme of things, God's evaluation matters more than man's, so we should concern ourselves with what the Spirit reveals to us about how we are living! We must see things through His eyes. Sometimes, however, the Spirit does use other people to point out our shortcomings and faults in a way that is consistent with Scripture and leads to repentance (Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15-20). But the evaluation must always come from the Spirit and never solely from man!

Question
7

Why can we not arbitrarily dismiss every evaluation that comes from humans? How has God used others to help you to recognize your fault and repent?

Therefore, Paul discounts any human judgment, including his own, because of its potential for error apart from the revelation and leading of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Paul even discredits his own ability to judge himself, emphatically stating, "**In fact, I do not even judge myself.**" He even began this section with the exhortation, "Let no one deceive himself." As humans, we can paint a wildly inaccurate picture of our standing with the Lord unless we seek His evaluation! In order to judge ourselves correctly, we must see ourselves from God's perspective. We must judge ourselves according to the standards set forth in Scripture and perfectly demonstrated to us through the Son! As such, Paul regards any judgment by other human beings as inconsequential or insignificant. Their critique carries no weight; it doesn't matter. God's assessment is what truly matters (v. 4).

Question
8

How does the Spirit help us to have an accurate evaluation of our lives? Why must we depend upon Him alone for a spiritual assessment or critique?

Perhaps, Paul also uses this expression "by men of the day" as a parallel to 1 Corinthians 3:13 where he noted that God would test the quality of our work with fire

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on “the Day.” The Day there refers to the day of judgment which occurs upon Jesus’ return when He comes to establish His Kingdom in full. On that day, God will test how we built upon the foundation of Christ—that is how we lived out our salvation and conducted our lives. Rather than be worried about our “day” in the court of public opinion so to speak, we should be worried about God’s coming day of judgment which will reveal all our works. We must live our lives in a way that honors and pleases Him.

In his own self-evaluation, Paul reports that he knows **of nothing against** himself. He’s not aware of any fault or wrongdoing in his life. Or more aptly, we could say that the Spirit has not revealed anything out of place in his life; He hasn’t corroborated the Corinthians’ misguided charges against Paul (see 2 Corinthians). This doesn’t mean that Paul had a clear conscience in exactly the same way we would use the expression today. But rather, he indicates that the Holy Spirit had not made him aware or revealed anything out of sorts in his life for which he should repent at this time. Certainly, Paul previously needed to repent when he formerly rejected Christ and persecuted the church. As he notes in Romans 7, there are also other times when he needed to repent and return to Christ when the Spirit showed him his fault (Rom 7:14-16, 23-25). But, at the current time, he is in right standing with the Lord and serving in the way that God expects.

Therefore, Paul instructs the Corinthians to **judge nothing before the time the Lord comes**

(v. 5). Based on the larger context of this passage, we must qualify Paul’s remarks here. He is not telling the Corinthians to forego any kind of spiritual evaluation in their lives in the present. He is certainly not telling them to forego the discernment of right and wrong in the world around them as well as in their own lives. This would contradict what he stated previously in 1 Corinthians 2:15 that “he who is spiritual judges all things.” From our lesson two weeks ago, we established that this phrase indicates that only the person who is led by the Spirit can truly be discerning and judge right from wrong. The same principle applies to this verse here in chapter 4. Paul is saying that we



can **judge nothing** on our own; we need the Spirit to give us the right perspective and reveal the truth. Otherwise, without the Spirit, we risk an inaccurate, fleshly assessment. For this reason, Paul points out that **the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart.**

To illustrate the flaw in human logic and evaluation, consider how important a key or legend is to read a map correctly. Even though most maps have some similar characteristics, such as the cardinal direction north being oriented to the top of the page, oftentimes the scale and details differ drastically. We need the information that the key provides in order to read the map correctly without error. For example, if we use the wrong scale, it would throw off distances and travel times severely. We need an accurate scale by which to measure it. In life, the Holy Spirit provides that legend or key through which we can accurately evaluate our lives. Without Him, we would have no hope of an accurate assessment. Our human logic can severely throw off our evaluation. The Holy Spirit through Scripture provides the only accurate scale by which we can measure our lives. We must rely upon Him as our key or guide!

Question
9

If you were to make a checklist, by what criteria does the Holy Spirit judge our lives? What sorts of things would He include on this checklist?

As we conclude our lesson this week, may we each take an honest evaluation of our lives, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us. Don't simply look in the mirror at the outward appearance because our fleshly mindset can often hinder the evaluation. For example, James writes, "If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (Jas 1:23-25). Through prayer and reading Scripture, ask the Spirit to show you the depths of your heart. Ask Him to reveal your innermost thoughts, your attitudes, and your motives. But be ready for an answer and be ready to act upon what He reveals!

Instruct

To “live by faith in the Son of God” entails that we fully adopt His perspective and surrender ourselves completely to His lordship. We no longer should be concerned with getting things our way or finding things that meet our preferences and expectations. His desires should consume us. His thoughts should fill our minds. His holy example should drive how we conduct our lives every day. Because we can only have life through the sacrifice He made on our behalf, we must die to the life of sin and personal preference we once held dear. And we must live for Him by partnering with other believers in the church in unity to exalt His name and fulfill the purpose to which He has called us!

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:25

Hopefully, we can declare like Paul that we **know of nothing against** ourselves—that God has revealed to us we’re on the right track and in right standing with Him. If so, we need to continue seeking Him and serving Him faithfully in every area of our lives. If, on the other hand, God reveals some areas in which we need improvement, we must repent. Allow the Holy Spirit to take control of those areas and begin serving God faithfully with all your being! As we examine our lives, may we also pay particular attention to our service and stewardship of the gospel. Are we giving God our best or do we give Him only the leftovers of our lives? Do we share the gospel regularly and use our spiritual gifts to advance His Kingdom daily? Most likely, we all have something that God will reveal to us on which we need to work together with His Spirit to correct. When we all do this collectively as His people, God will be able to use us mightily as His church here in Fort Worth!

The name Benedict Arnold has become synonymous with disloyalty and treason. On the other hand, names like Abraham, Joseph, and Paul depict faithfulness. They weren't perfect people, but they were faithful in consistently serving the Lord. Paul lists faithfulness as the most desirable characteristic of a steward. God wants someone trustworthy as His representative. He wants someone who will be dependable to get the job done—to take the gospel to the ends of the earth while continuing to safeguard the accuracy and truthfulness of its message. The question thus becomes: Are we faithful? Can God depend upon us to do the work to which He has called us? Each of us must answer these two questions daily. We must ensure that we have aligned ourselves with God's mission and are working together with His people to advance His Kingdom. We don't do this alone. The Holy Spirit equips us with all the tools we need and guides us throughout this process. Therefore, may we unite corporately in this mission He has given us as His church here in Fort Worth and faithfully communicate the gospel to our city, nation, and world. Let's all join together so that on the day when Christ returns to institute His judgment that we might hear, "Well, done My good and faithful servants!"

Incorporate

What did God reveal to you in your self-examination this week? What actions does this evaluation require? In other words, what is God leading you to do?

How would you evaluate your service and stewardship of the gospel in this local congregation? What fruit do you see?

In what ways can we as a church do better in reaching our culture with the gospel of Christ without compromising its message?

Journal: Document God's Work

February 23, 2025



United in Mindset

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Focal Verse:

"For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church."

1 Corinthians 4:17

Introduce

Even in the digital world in which we live today, we still use the phrase “Kodak moment” to describe a special occasion, memorable event, or breath-taking scene worthy of being preserved for posterity in a photograph. For those of us old enough to remember the time before digital cameras and smartphones, we would recognize the Eastman Kodak Company as the pre-eminent manufacturer of film. Founded in 1888 by George Eastman, this company would dominate the photography market for nearly 120 years. Prior to SD cards, we would first need to insert a roll of film—mostly likely produced by Eastman Kodak—into our cameras before we could snap a picture. Each time we would take a picture we then had to wind or advance the film using a lever on top of the camera. Depending on the size of the roll, we could take either twenty-four or thirty-six photos before we had to use that same lever to rewind the film so that we could remove it and take it to the store for development. Unless we had a Polaroid camera that instantly printed a photograph on the spot, this was the way of life for any photographer.

But what happened to the Eastman Kodak Company—once one



of the largest, most successful companies of the twentieth century? What led to its demise? At first blush, we may assume that technology simply caught the company off guard and it didn't respond quickly enough to change. Yet, the company was often at the forefront of innovation. For instance, Steve Sasson, an Eastman Kodak employee, created the first digital camera in 1975 and the company subsequently spent billions researching this new technology, but they never acted on it.* In addition, long before Instagram and other social media, the company also bought the photo-sharing site Ofoto, but only used it to try and convince people to physically print their digital photos.*

In his analysis of the company's bankruptcy and dissolution in 2012, Scott Anthony cites two reasons why the company failed. First, he proposes, “Doing something and doing the right [emphasis his] thing are also different things.”* Although the company saw the proverbial writing on the wall of the rapidly coming digital age, they didn't

Introduce

correctly apply what they had learned from their research and development. They still had the confidence that they could convince people to print their digital photographs, thereby weathering the storm. Even though they appeared to do something by developing digital platforms, they didn't do the right thing to continue their success. Second, this leads Anthony to postulate that "their failure is usually an inability to truly embrace the new business models the disruptive change opens up."* In other words, they didn't change their approach and so died a slow death as this new innovation overtook them.

In our study of 1 Corinthians this week, these same two principles apply to the Corinthians' situation. They may have seemed to have been doing something for the cause of Christ, but they weren't doing the right thing. They wrongly placed confidence in their own ability and position rather than in Christ. As we will learn in future lessons, this led them to act immorally, destroying unity in the church instead of advancing the gospel to the glory of Christ. So, they needed correction. They needed to get back on track.

Moreover, they also failed to "embrace" their new character and position in Christ. They refused to change. They refused to imitate Christ and conform their lives to His. Instead, they continued to live as they always had. They exhibited pride and arrogance rather than humility. Everything for them became a competition—whether to show their pseudo-spirituality, to display their wealth and status, or to flaunt their intelligence and wisdom. As believers, let us embrace the change that Christ has produced within us. Let us display it in the way that we live. As His people, may we be united in our mindset so that we can see ourselves through His eyes and do the right thing by living a transformed life that reflects His character.

Key
Question

What makes it so difficult to have a transformed mind?

In Reference



*Scott D. Anthony, "Kodak's Downfall Wasn't about Technology," *Harvard Business Review* (July 15, 2016), available from hbr.org.

1 Corinthians 4:6-7

THE CASE FOR UNITY

Paul announces that he has applied the principles in this passage **figuratively to Apollos** and himself as an example for the Corinthians to follow (v. 6). He wants them to **learn not** to go **beyond what is written** so they might eliminate the arrogance and pride that have gripped their community. When he states that he has spoken **figuratively**, Paul refers to the analogies of the farmer (3:6-9a) and the builder (3:9b-15) which he used to demonstrate how he and Apollos worked together to accomplish the will of the Lord. They didn't compete like opponents for accolades, status, or popularity, but they worked in tandem to point people to the Lord! So far, Paul has spent nearly one-fourth of this entire letter dealing with the lack of unity and cooperation because it was such a central problem in the church.

Paul indicates that he has spoken **figuratively** in the previous verses (3:1-4:5) because he wants the Corinthians to **learn not** to go **beyond what is written**. This is one of the most difficult phrases in 1 Corinthians to decipher precisely what Paul means and, so, it has received much attention. The Greek literally reads: "in us you might learn not beyond which is written." For example, the ESV attempts to smooth out the translation by adding "not to go beyond" and the NAS "not to exceed **what is written**." Both the CSB and the NIV treat the phrase as a common proverb or saying from the first century with which both parties would have been familiar; therefore, they add the phrase "*the meaning of the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written,'*" to clarify it.

Whether Paul uses a proverbial saying or slogan to get his point across doesn't really matter, what he means by going **beyond "what is written"** should concern us more.

Although many proposals exist, we'll

only deal with the ones that have the most merit. Some, for instance, have proposed that this phrase applies only to 1 Corinthians: do **not** go **beyond what is written** *in this letter*. Accordingly, Paul wants them to pay attention to the things he's said thus far so that they don't get caught up in self-glorification; he wants them to **learn** to work



together to advance the gospel and glorify the Lord rather than becoming mired in competition and succumbing to a “fleshly” mindset. While this interpretation is possible, the New Testament authors, including Paul, don’t typically use the phrase “**what is written**” to refer to their own writings; they almost exclusively use it as a reference to Scripture as a whole (i.e., the Old Testament).

It seems most likely that Paul incorporates the phrase to inform the Corinthians not to go beyond what is written in Scripture. Scripture provides all we need to live successfully because it reveals God’s wisdom and plan. It is sufficient to instruct us in every area of life. We don’t need any other human document or philosophy to guide us. God has spoken clearly and plainly to us through His Word. “What is written” doesn’t refer to a specific scriptural passage, but rather communicates a general principle about the interpretation and application of Scripture by which we must abide. As believers, our perspective and worldview must be derived solely from Scripture and not based on our own philosophies and opinions. The Corinthians, however, had allowed their “fleshly” mindset to cloud their judgment and control their thinking; their flesh, not Scripture, had become their primary guide for how they viewed the world. Paul, therefore, urges them to return to Scripture as their sole source of wisdom that will shape their worldview and influence their behavior!

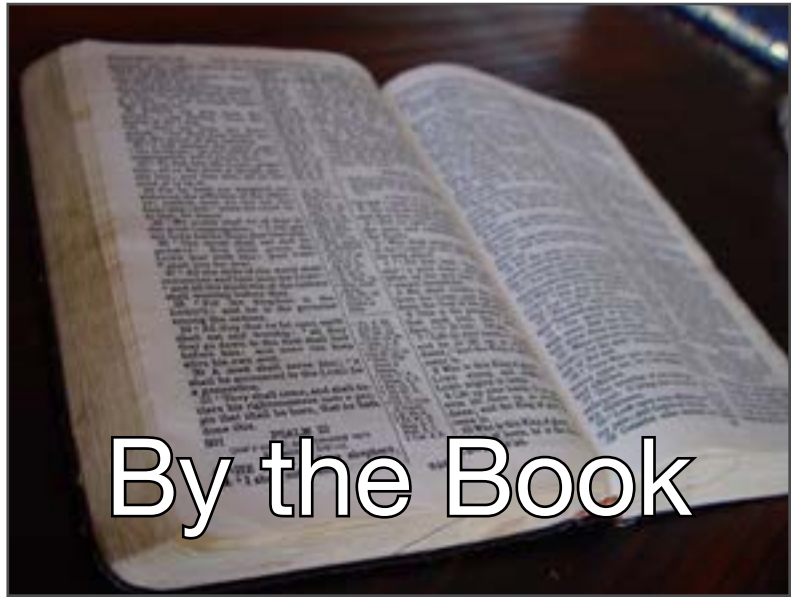
Question
1

What is the danger of going beyond what is written in Scripture?

We can draw two implications from Paul’s practical advice **not** to go **beyond what is written**. First, we must always filter our understanding and worldview through the lens of Scripture. We cannot allow culture to dictate our beliefs. We must never formulate our beliefs according to popular consensus or the supposed collective wisdom of mankind; we must always formulate them based on what God has said! Therefore, any evaluation or assessment we make must have a scriptural precedent. Anything we do, say, or believe should be consistent with what God has said in His Word. Today, we have the expression “by the book” which means to follow the rules exactly. In a way, Paul has used this phrase “**beyond what is written**” to say the same thing here: “Go by the Book (Bible); obediently do what God has said in it!”

If the Corinthians had immersed themselves in God’s Word, they would have

immediately seen the contradictory nature of their actions. Scripture clearly condemns pride and promotes humility in a number of places. For example, Proverbs 8:13 states, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate." The Corinthians need to look no further than Scripture to see how God expects them to act with humility rather than pride (see also Prov 11:2; 16:5, 18; Psalm 10:4). God could not speak any more plainly against the sin of pride and arrogance than this; He hates it! Because they valued man's wisdom and adopted a fleshly mindset instead of Spirit-led one, the Corinthians had become blind. They could not see how this detestable lifestyle created dysfunction and disunity in their church, destroying their witness for the Lord!




God's wisdom flies in the face of conventional cultural understanding which encourages us to make a name for ourselves. To some extent, the world values self-promotion. It teaches us highlight our achievements so we can improve our standing in the community. It tells us to toot our own horn occasionally and tout our own accomplishments. Today, people don't just display their collection of trophies on their mantel or list all their accomplishments in their resumes; they post them all over their social media for everyone to see. As long as it's not too obscenely obnoxious, the world champions boasting and encourages competition. As such, the world has become self-absorbed, concerned only with their personal interests and the things that help them advance their cause. We see this attitude displayed in Nebuchadnezzar who arrogantly boasted in all his accomplishments despite Daniel's clear warning that God would humble the king if he continued down this path (Dan 4).

Question
2

Why is ordering our lives by Book (Bible) not legalistic as the world would define it? What would make it legalistic?

Instruct

Even in moderation, pride, boasting, and competition conflicts with how Scripture has called us to act. Through His Word, God has instructed us to glorify Him, not boast in our personal achievements (Jer 9:24; 1 Cor 1:31). Without Him, we have achieved nothing. We owe everything we have and who we have become in Christ to Him alone. Therefore, we must allow Scripture, not culture, to condition how we think and act. When we live “by the Book” according to the boundaries God has set for us, we will make God the priority in our lives rather than selfishly seeking our desires and getting our way (Exod 20:3-5; Deut 6:5). No one will become arrogant or prideful. We will all willingly work together for God’s glory in the church. We won’t see our service as a competition to earn status, recognition, and rewards in the coming Kingdom, but as a way to express our deep love and gratitude to the Lord who has given us life!



You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:5

Second, we should **not** go **beyond** the simple, plain meaning of the biblical text within its historical setting. In other words, we must communicate its message plainly and clearly so everyone can understand it. We should never convolute or make God’s Word more complicated than it truly is. The gospel is straightforward and simple, but man with his so-called “superior” intellect has made it more difficult than God intended. In fact, Paul has based his whole argument so far on the simplicity of the gospel summed up by the phrase Christ crucified (1 Cor 2:2). God paid our debt and offered us salvation by grace free of charge when we repent or turn from our sins! It’s that easy to comprehend! To understand the gospel correctly, we must hear what God says in His Word; we must read and apply it for ourselves rather than relying only on what others say about it. This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t study Scripture in depth or use other resources like this curriculum to aid us, but rather that we must seek to hear God speak in the context in which He communicated His Word.

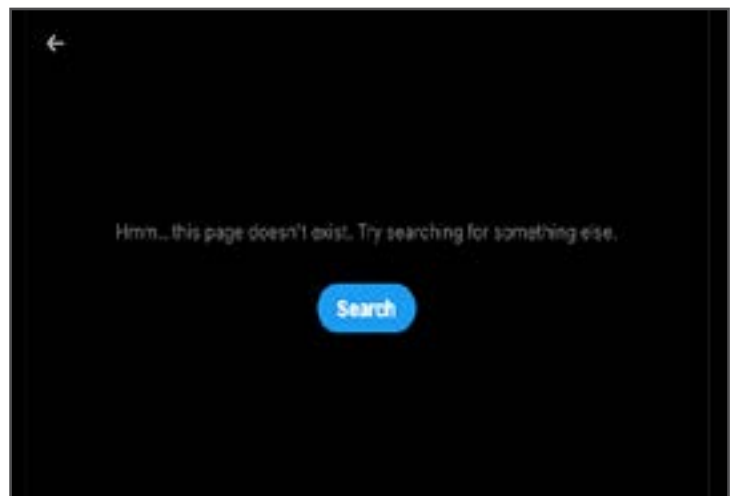
Question
3

In what ways do people today convolute Scripture by attempting to make it sound more relevant to the culture? Specifically, how can this distort its meaning?

Moreover, like the Apostle Peter, we must admit that there are some hard-to-understand principles and concepts in Scripture. For instance, he acknowledges that Paul's letters contain "some things hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). Even so, the general meaning of the text is still understandable for people who will take time to read it with insight through the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21). We lose sight of the meaning of the text when we begin adding our own preferences and opinions into the mix. For this reason, Peter notes that "untaught and unstable people twist [Paul's letters] to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). We obscure Scripture's meaning when we try to fit it into our own agenda instead of allowing it to shape us. In addition, we can also distort by reading our own ideas into it. Instead of actually hearing what God has said through His Word, we try to make the text say what we want it to say (2 Tim 4:3).

To illustrate this principle, let's examine a recent post on X by Rick Warren. In this now-deleted post, he appears to irresponsibly handle Scripture by distorting the original context to advance a misguided agenda. Using John 19:18 as his basis, Warren posts, "They crucified Jesus with two others—one on each side & Jesus in the middle.'The guys on both sides were thieves. If you're looking for the #realJesus, not a caricature disfigured by partisan motivations, you'll find him in the middle, not on either side." Even if just poorly worded, this post obfuscates or obscures the plain sense of the gospel which our culture can then seize to advance its agenda of tolerance and acceptance. Consequently, Warren has done a grave disservice to the clarity of the gospel by not sticking to the plain sense of the text!

He has distorted this text by allegorizing it or interpreting Jesus' physical position on the cross between two thieves symbolically. This is unwarranted and misses the point entirely. If God had wanted us to regard this as symbolic in some way, He would have inspired the author to make such a connection clear. Without going into a full discussion of interpretation, Scripture has specific ways of indicating to us when we should view something as symbolic or a figure of speech or if we should draw a particular conclusion from the historical



Instruct

context. Only in Luke 23:32-33 and 39-43 do we learn what actually transpired as Jesus hung between these two thieves. One thief joined in the crowd to blaspheme Jesus saying, “If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” The other thief rebuked these words, realizing that Jesus had “done nothing wrong.” Whereas they deserved to die, this thief recognized that Jesus did not. Having recognized his own sin, this thief turned to Jesus for salvation who while hanging there on the cross assured him that he would join Him in paradise that very day.

The only legitimate conclusion that we can draw from this event is that salvation in Christ is open to all people no matter who they are or what they have done. Some people will recognize their sin and turn to Jesus (repent) for salvation—even at the last minute. Others, however, will choose to persist in their sin and reject Him. Unfortunately, it seems that Warren attempts to use this episode in Jesus’ life to suggest that somehow He was in the middle of the political spectrum.



Although Jesus was apolitical in one sense, He was not in the middle as portrayed in this post; He always had a very clear stance on the side of truth! It’s what caused the conflict with all the political and religious leaders of His day. Turning over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple and driving out their animals with a whip doesn’t sound like being in the middle (Matt 21:12-17; John 2:13-16). Jesus never compromised. He never allowed any political movement or religious interpretation from obscuring the truth. In fact, He even chastises the church in Laodicea for being “lukewarm” (Rev 3:15-16).

Question
4

What lessons should we learn from Rick Warren’s post on X about our own posting on social media and the communication of God’s Word?

What can we learn from Warren’s post about how we should interpret Scripture? We should stick to the literal, historical meaning of the text unless otherwise specified

by the biblical author (i.e., Revelation). We must also examine Scripture holistically. We should use the parts that we clearly understand to help us interpret the more difficult parts. God will never contradict Himself, so we must view Scripture as a whole rather than risk taking things grossly out of context. Moreover, we shouldn't hunt for a text to prove our point, but rather we should let God speak to us through His Word. We need to listen to what He says! Rather than try to be cute and creative, which often leads to trouble, we should communicate the gospel plainly with simplicity. We should present its message clearly and concisely so there is no room for misunderstanding or ambiguity. If we would seek to communicate the simple, clear truth of the gospel and stop to listen to what God actually says, it would reduce much of the dysfunction, disunity, and misunderstanding in the church as a whole.



Paul now introduces a series of three rhetorical questions to remind the Corinthians that we're all cut from the same cloth so to speak. In the church, there is no room for spiritual pride (lit., "being puffed up) because God has shown us all the same grace! For this reason, Paul begins by asking, "For who makes you differ from another" (v. 7)? He follows this question by asking, "And what do you have that you did not receive" and "Why do you boast as if you had not received it?" The difference in perceived status or ability in the church comes not from God who dispenses grace with impartiality, but from the Corinthians' flawed, fleshly thinking. They have forgotten that they owe everything to the Lord. Every spiritual blessing comes from Him (Eph 1:3). If we have attained nothing on our own, we have nothing about which we can personally boast. Our boast ought to be in Christ who has rescued us from sin and raised us to new life in Him.

Question
5

How often do you stop to declare verbal praise (not just think it) about what the Lord has done through you and the abilities that He's given you?

1 Corinthians 4:8-13

THEIR CORRUPT THINKING

Since some in the Corinthian church viewed themselves as superior to others, Paul warns about the danger of such a fleshly mindset. Some have wrongly perceived that they have **already** received their inheritance in Christ in full and have been made completely perfect, but in reality they are still living in the flesh (see 1 John 3:2). This faulty understanding leads them to think that they can do whatever they want since they have **already** secured their salvation in Christ. In so doing, they abuse God's grace (Rom 6:1-10). Instead of uniting themselves together by practicing Christ's righteousness, they act like the world around them and even worse in some cases (1 Cor 5:1)! In a sense, they are portraying themselves as "spiritually" mature or elite—something they are not.

Question
6

In what ways does our world today misunderstand grace?

Writing sarcastically, Paul chides them because they have regarded themselves as **already full** and **already rich** (v. 8). They have **already** begun their reign **as kings without** them (Paul and Apollos). In their minds, they have **already** taken their rightful place alongside Jesus as joint heirs. This causes Paul to opine about how he really wished they **did reign** so that he and Apollos **might also reign with** them. Rather than highlighting their achievements and successes as they so desperately wanted, their pretentious lifestyle actually served to expose their motives and distract from the ministry of the gospel. Instead of expressing their gratitude through their obedience and humble service, the Corinthians declared their independence. Their flawed thinking demonstrated their self-centered nature, their self-serving pursuits, their self-gratifying actions, and their self-sufficiency. Their flamboyant lives screamed, "Look at me!" It was all about them and their pursuits—not Christ and His divine will.

Question
7

How does the world influence our thinking about our self-worth or value?

Paul shows the irony in the Corinthians' self-promotion by comparing their self-perceived carefree, stable, and lavish lifestyle with the struggles of **the apostles**. He argues that God **has displayed** them as the least (i.e., **last**) of all people (v. 9). Like the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets (Heb 11:35b-38), many of **the apostles** had

been **condemned to death**. Indeed, church history bears this out. Not only did the church face intense persecution as a whole (see Acts and 1 Peter), but history records that many of **the apostles** themselves were put to death as a result of their belief in Christ. Therefore, Paul notes how they were **made a spectacle to the entire world**. The word translated **made a spectacle** often refers to a gladiatorial field where criminals and slaves fought to death. While some Christians may have experienced this fate at a later time in history, here it is used metaphorically to describe how **the apostles** appeared weak and worthless to the world; they were nobodies and, even worse, failures in the world's eyes.

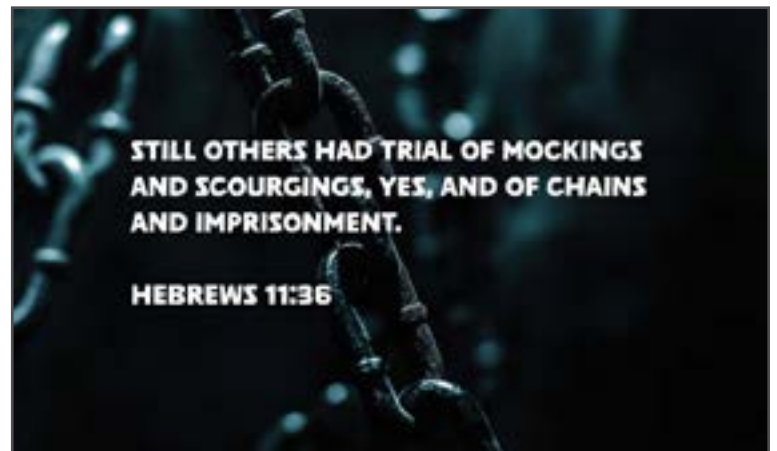
Using their own language against them, Paul continues the comparison.

The apostles are perceived **as fools**

for Christ's sake, but the Corinthians champion themselves **as wise in Christ** (v. 10).

The apostles are weak, but they see themselves as **strong**. Likewise, the Corinthians regard themselves **as distinguished** because of their earthly status, but **the apostles are dishonored** as a result of their lowly position (i.e., **last** in v. 9). In addition to this direct comparison with the Corinthians' current self-evaluation, Paul lists a litany of persecutions **the apostles** must **endure** daily.

Many items in this list are repeated in Paul's personal testimony about the perils he encounters in ministry where he uses much of the same language in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 to describe his own situation. At the time Paul penned the words of this letter, **the apostles** hungered and thirsted, were **poorly clothed, beaten, and homeless**. To make ends meet, they worked bi-vocationally, balancing ministry with their occupations in order to provide for their families. They were also **reviled** or mocked, **persecuted**, and **defamed** or slandered. No one treated them with deference or respect. Quite the opposite, they received copious amounts of ridicule and shame.



Question
8

What hardships have you encountered because of your faith in Christ and proclamation of the gospel?

Instruct

Despite being treated like garbage (i.e., **the filth of the world**) and worthless scraps (i.e., **offscouring**), **the apostles** did not respond in kind to these vicious attacks (v. 13). They willingly endured them for the sake of Christ. Instead of hurling insults when others mocked them, they resorted to praise. They turned their attention to the Lord and blessed Him. When others slandered them, they responded with encouraging or kind words (i.e., **entreat**). They did not enter the fracas. They remained focused on Christ and the mission He had set before them.

But how could they do this in the face of such severe opposition? It wasn't because they were "spiritually" superior to the Corinthians as they had portrayed themselves over **the apostles**. Nor was it because of their positions as **apostles**. Although Paul doesn't go into detail here in 1 Corinthians, he does so in the letter to the Philippians which he wrote while under house arrest in Rome. There, Paul reveals the key to his success: "contentment." In Philippians 4:11b-12, he writes, "For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Question
9

How would you describe your contentment in life? What things do you pursue? What is most important to you?

Paul can be content in life regardless of his circumstances because he looks to Christ. He keeps his eyes fixed on Him. He looks beyond his current circumstances to the promises the Lord has made. Therefore, Paul can pen these words which many believers often take out of context: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). Within this particular context, Paul isn't saying that Christ has given him strength to do extraordinary things or even the strength to do everyday activities successfully as many believers often use this verse to do. On the contrary, Christ has given Paul, and the apostles, *the strength to be content*

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH
CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

in all circumstances. He has given them the ability to **endure** without becoming disheartened or even resorting to the world's tactics of retaliation!

In other words, Christ is all we need. We don't need to look any further to find contentment and satisfaction than to place our lives in His hands! We live in a world that pursues the temporary. They seek contentment based squarely upon their material possessions, finances, fame, awards, college degrees, and a whole host of other things. However, they will never find true contentment in any of these areas. They will always long for more because nothing will ever satisfy. Thus, the world becomes a competition to outdo the other rather than enjoying the fruit of blessings which comes from a life lived in Christ. For example, we sometimes describe the corporate world as a "rat race." Society often bears the ignominious label "dog eat dog" in their pursuit of success. Many people spend all their time and energy trying to "keep up with the Joneses" so they can have the latest and greatest. As a result of this mindset, they tend to seek fulfillment and find value in how others view them and the status which they can attain. It becomes all about how people perceive them, so they desperately want to "keep up appearances" instead of living authentically.

Question
10

Do the things in which you seek contentment and fulfillment reflect what God desires most? If not, what needs to change? If so, how is God using you to bear fruit for His kingdom?

God wants us to give Him the priority in our lives. To do this, we must make Him first and ourselves last. The world, however, has turned this principle on its head. It exhorts us to take care of our own needs first and use whatever means we have to get ahead in life regardless of the cost. Unfortunately, this attitude has crept into the church. Many people occupy a pew rather than join in serving. Many forgo their relationship with Christ at the expense of their personal goals and pursuits. Our time becomes the most precious thing in our lives. We fill it with things we deem important and in which we find joy, but we sometimes relegate God to the background. We may attend church, but our careers, relationships, recreation, sports, education, and entertainment all have more prominence than Christ. To the world, we may look successful. But to Christ, who sees the depths of our hearts, how do we truly appear?

Instruct

Let us not look merely on the outward appearance like the Corinthians did, but ask Christ to help us truthfully examine the depths of our hearts so that we might be found obedient in doing His will.

1 Corinthians 4:14-16

THE CHARGE GIVEN

Paul does not want to publicly **shame** the Corinthians, but to **warn** or correct them as a father would his **children** (v. 14). Since he first brought the gospel to them, he counts on this special bond to persuade them to look at their behavior more carefully. Even though they may have had many guardians or **instructors in Christ**, they **only have one father**: Paul (v. 15). Guardians, in this context, refer to people like Apollos who came to the city later to help them continue growing in their faith. They may have had many people over the years come continue the teaching, but only Paul could say that he led them to faith in Christ through the gospel. Thus, he sees himself as their spiritual **father** so to speak. As their spiritual **father**, Paul has set an example for them to follow. He didn't come only to preach the gospel verbally along with religious doctrine, but he visibly lived it before them. They could both hear and see how God had transformed him; they could see the result of the gospel of Christ in His life!

Consequently, Paul urges the Corinthians to **imitate** him (v. 16). In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he further clarifies why they should **imitate** him when he writes, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." In other letters Paul often exhorts the people to follow the example they saw in him (Phil 3:17; 2 Thess 3:7, 9). To be able to challenge believers to **imitate** him required that he be consistent. His life must constantly reflect Christ. At any time no matter where he may be, people had to see Christ through him! This should greatly challenge us, too. As a believer, every one of us should reflect Christ in our lives. Christ should be consistently on display so that the world can see Him through us. We ought to live in such a way that we can also say, "Imitate me because I imitate Christ."

Question
11

Why is it important that every believer be able to say, "Imitate me?"

Unfortunately, many believers shirk this responsibility and pattern themselves after the world. They say, "Do as I say not as I do." They don't live with consistency. They know the truth, but they don't apply it for others to see as an example. And, even

worse, they don't understand that God has called every one of us to be an example to follow! We can live like the Apostle Paul. He wasn't some "super Christian" who could easily endure these things and live an exemplary life. In fact, he himself struggled at times (Rom 7). Yet, Paul could be an example because he surrendered himself to the Holy Spirit and allowed Him to guide his life. As Paul has already proven (1 Cor 2:13; 3:16), we have the same access to Holy Spirit in our lives. So, we have no excuse. We must order our lives as an example to see how Christ has transformed us so that we might point people into a relationship with Him.

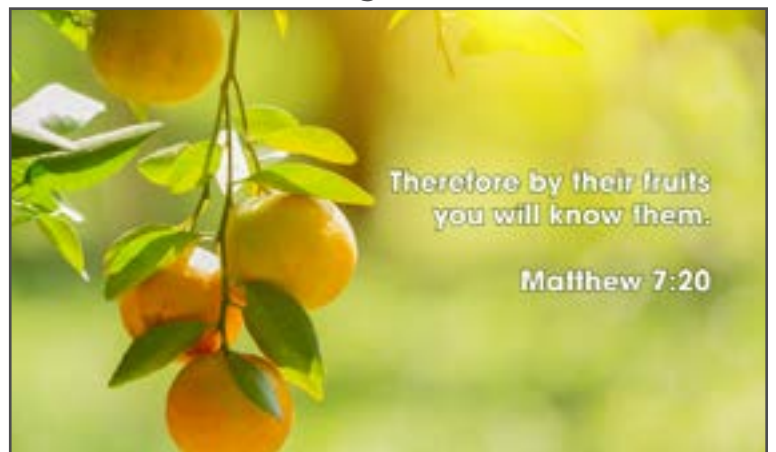
Question
12

Would you want other people imitating you? Why or why not?

1 Corinthians 4:17-21

THE CORRECTION NEEDED

In order to help them get back on track, Paul has **sent** his trusted protégé, **Timothy**, to **remind** them of how he had lived among them (i.e., **my ways in Christ**) as well as what he continues to teach **everywhere in every church**—the consistency about which we talked in the last section displayed (v. 17). He has **sent** Timothy as a temporary substitute for his physical presence because some have stubbornly persisted in their pride as if Paul **were not coming** (v. 18). Timothy in a sense served as his proxy, but Paul himself would **come shortly if the Lord** willed to straighten out this mess (v. 19). Paul will then see for himself those who have **puffed themselves up** with pride and arrogance because it will become patently evident through their effectiveness in ministry. In other words, Paul will see the fruit of their work which will differentiate the fraud from the faithful (Matt 7:15-20)!



Paul further explains that **the kingdom of God is not in word but in power** (v. 20). The Apostle makes a similar statement to the Thessalonians which will shed light on our current passage: "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and much assurance" (1 Thess 1:5). In both passages, Paul

Instruct

argues that **the kingdom of God** or gospel is not based on meaningless words, empty promises, or speculative philosophies that do not have the ability to change a person. On the contrary, God's **kingdom** is effective precisely because it has the **power** to transform an individual completely. The gospel works! We can see the evidence through the lives it has changed. Therefore, they should stop acting like the unbelieving world and start acting like God's people. They must live up to God's expectations and standards. They have no excuse for failure other than their own willful disobedience! They have the ability or **power** to meet God's expectations because the Holy Spirit dwells within them the moment God saved them!

Question
13

What excuses do people often give as to why they repeatedly make the same mistakes?

Paul concludes this section of the letter with an ultimatum delivered through a rhetorical question: "**What do you want?**" He lays the groundwork for their course correction by giving them a choice. Would they prefer he comes **with a rod of correction** or **in love and a spirit of gentleness** (v. 21)? Although Paul isn't literally threatening to use corporal punishment, his threat isn't idle either. He will do whatever it takes to bring the Corinthian church back in line with God's righteousness. If they don't repent and start acting righteously, he will come down on them harshly! Yet, Paul himself would prefer the later method of correcting **in love** with a **spirit of gentleness**. After all, he has already expressed his desire to come to them like a loving father. But like a true parent, Paul realizes that he must utilize different tactics on the different people to motivate them to return to their Christ-centered mindset. To change the behavior of one child, for example, it might require a spanking whereas another child might only require a stern look or forceful tone.

Nonetheless, Paul's ultimatum with the Corinthians shows the reality of their sin and the harm it has done to their community as a whole, including their ability to advance the gospel in their city. As we will see in the coming weeks, Paul will deal with specific sins in Corinth that have derailed their God-given mission. God doesn't take any sin lightly—no matter how trivial it may seem to us. We shouldn't overlook or ignore sin in our midst either. We must each examine ourselves to ensure that we are in right standing with the Lord and in right fellowship with His community. Everyone in the

church needs to strive to live righteously together. God has given us all the resources we need to do this. He has outlined His expectations and boundaries in Scripture. He has given us a visible example to follow in Jesus. He has sent His Holy Spirit to indwell our hearts the moment we accepted Christ as our Savior. Therefore, we need to surrender ourselves to the His control and adopt His mindset so that we can function as the community that God has called us to be.

Question
14

Why do many churches no longer practice church discipline on a sinning member? What makes biblically-based church discipline difficult in the twenty-first century?

Inspire

In the introduction, we saw how the Eastman Kodak Company had many innovative ideas well ahead of the development of new digital technology, but their ideas never translated into practice. They used these new ideas to continue investing in their old technology which ultimately led to their demise. In a manner of speaking, the Corinthians did this same thing. They knew the truth. They had begun to see the evidence of the transformation Christ produced in their lives. But then they reverted back to their former mindset and old way of life. They misused their newfound freedom in Christ to live corruptly rather than righteously. This caused dysfunction and disunity in their church. As believers, we need adopt the mindset Christ has instilled within us in every area of our lives. We can't treat it as some novelty that we can keep on the back shelf for when it seems most convenient. His mindset needs to permeate our lives so that it influences everything we do. May others see the radical transformation of the gospel within us!

Incorporate

How well do you know Scripture? How much does it truly impact the way you live daily?

How would you compare your time studying the Bible to the amount of time you spend listening to podcasts, watching DIY programs, or reading self-help books, including Christian literature? Why is it important to always seek Scripture first even though so many go straight to these programs for information?

What change has the gospel produced in your life? What changes may you need to make this week because some of your previous worldly mindset has surfaced?

Journal: Document God's Work

February 2025

Written and Published by
First Baptist Church of Fort Worth

For more information
or for questions
please contact
mikeneal@fbcfw.org

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5001 NE Loop 820 • Fort Worth, TX • 76137
(817) 485-7711 • info@fbcfw.org